



Bestowing
The
Starry
Sky
upon
this
Dreaming
Princess

A TIME in the LIMELIGHT for THIS FOOL too!

3

GIFTING
this
WONDERFUL
WORLD with
BLESSINGS
EXTRA

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ANO OROKAMONO NI MO KYAKKOU WO!

– Dust spinoff: A time in the limelight for this fool too! –

- VOLUME 3 -

**Bestowing the Starry Sky upon this
Dreaming Princess**

**-AUTHOR-
Hirukuma**

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[Cannongerbil (CGTranslations)]

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RAIN

I need to dry my clothes

The sticky stuff finally came off. Damn, even my underwear is soaked.

CLAIRE



IRIS

That suspicious person over there! What are you doing?



Eh? If that's really possible, it'll definitely sell

WIZ



It's my treat, so don't worry about it.

LOLI SUCCUBUS



Um, e-er..

YUNYUN




You are really a villain, aren't you?

LYNN



Well, that's how it is. Wanna go get some tea?

DUST

An anime-style illustration of two young women in a bathhouse. The woman in the foreground has long, flowing blonde hair and blue eyes, looking back over her shoulder with a slightly nervous expression. She is wearing a white off-the-shoulder top and a long white skirt with a ruffled hem. The woman in the background has shorter blonde hair and blue eyes, looking forward with a confident, slightly mischievous smile. She is wearing a light blue bikini top and white pants. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with soft, out-of-focus light spots, suggesting a steamy bathhouse environment.

I-Is
that so?
Then I'll
strip too!
That's
fine, right?

I can
take
it off
myself!
Please don't
stare at
me that
much.

Character

LYNN

Occupation: Mage

Dust's party member.
Seems to be regarded
as his guardian when-
ever he causes problems.

DUST

Occupation: Warrior

A somewhat famous adven-
turer in the town of Axel.
There are some weird rumours
surrounding him, but no one
seems to know the truth.

YUNYUN

Occupation: Archmage

Even though her skills
as a mage are well
spoken of, she
generally works alone.

LOLI
SUCCUBUS

Occupation: Salesperson

Succubus who works at the
shop that provides good
dreams to male adventurers.
Has an unassertive
personality.

AQUA
Occupation:
Archpriest

MEGUMIN
Occupation:
Archmage

DARKNESS
Occupation:
Crusader

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Foreword

<This segment originally appears at end of the book, but it reads more like a teaser, so I thought it fits better here.>

I can't believe it, the third volume is actually here.

This volume has Dust getting involved with the first princess of Belzerg, Iris.

Dust and Iris previously interacted in the spinoff (Continued: Gifting this Wonderful World with Explosions!) written by Akatsuki-sensei, so I've always wanted to write about them. And now I finally have the chance!

She is one of the more popular characters in Konosuba, so I've agonized greatly over how to handle her, but I think I've managed to adequately convey her charm across in my writings... It'll be fine, right?

I hope you look forward to seeing her in action. This book also touches a little on Dust's past, so I hope you look forward to seeing that as well. I wonder if this would change the image of Dust that everyone has in their minds?

Apart from Iris, her bodyguards/educators, Claire and Rain, also have a time in the spotlight. The two of them are often toyed around with by Kazuma in the main series, but in this spinoff, for certain reasons, they end up going on an adventure together with Dust and get up to all kinds of hijinks.

Additionally, one of the minor characters who made an appearance in the main series will be making an appearance as well. Those who start by reading the afterword first might have some fun trying to guess who it could be.

I feel that the most important thing about this series is to give those characters that aren't part of Kazuma and the main party a chance to shine. Every volume should feature a side character. I hope to maintain this rule in my works.

As for Dust, I want to make him seem more scummy, yet I also want to show off his cool side... This balancing act is a hard one to pull off.

I've mentioned this before, but this volume will touch more on Dust's past that was hinted at in volume 1 and 2, so do look forward to it.

Now then, this might be a little early, but allow me to talk a little about the next volume.

The next volume will have a certain special edition, and according to certain rumours will have a special drama CD included. And perhaps Hirukuma is currently working on the script...

And certain other rumours say that Hirukuma is the one who's looking forwards to it the most...

It is still a work in progress, so I can't provide any more concrete information, but please look forward to it. I'll give it my all.

On a different topic, the child of a friend of mine recently told me "Oji-san, you drew this? You are a really great artist!". He ended up really disappointed when I told him that I'm not the one who drew it. Yuuki Hagure-sensei, thank you for the wonderful drawings that you always provide for each volume.

Well, keeping with this flow, it's time to offer words of thanks and appreciation to everyone who helped me.

Natsume-sensei, thank you for giving me free reign this time too. I truly realized how loveable of a little sister character that Iris is while I was writing this volume, and I had a lot of fun bringing her to life. I hope for your continued support in the future!

Mishima Kurone-sensei. I had the chance to properly examine Iris's, Claire's, and Rain's illustrations this time, and Rain looks really amazing... Thank you for providing me with the reference material!

My thanks to all the editors at Sneaker Bunko, Mr M in charge, and everyone involved in the production of this book. Thank you very much.

And of course, all of you readers who picked up this book. I'm satisfied as an author if my works bring even the slightest bit of joy to you. I hope to see you again in the next volume.

Prologue

“W-Wait, Claire, that tickles!”

“W-We’re both women, so there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. *Pant Pant*. Come on, let’s go.”

A girl laughing as she twisted her body and a lady who approaches with heavy breaths.

Both of them have blonde hair and blue eyes. It is obvious from a glance that they are nobility.

I only just got to know them, but to be honest, I’m really not great with these types of people.

Darkness is still fine considering her usual behaviour, but I really don’t want to get involved with royalty and nobility.

Well, this time is an exception.

Regardless of any principles I might have, there’s no way I can take my eyes off these two girls right now.

I can confidently declare that there isn’t a single man on this world who can pry their gazes away from two young ladies wrestling with each other!

The woman who’s trying to forcibly strip the clothes of the young girl, Claire, and the half naked young girl who resisted amidst giggles, Iris.

I didn’t think I was into this kind of thing, but this sight isn’t too bad. Maybe I should get Loli Succubus to show me a similar dream in the future.

This might seem like a crime from an outsider’s perspective, but it’s just two girls fooling around in the dressing room, so there are no problems from a legal standpoint.

...Though I probably would’ve called the cops if I stumbled upon such a scene without any context.

“I can undress myself, so please don’t stare at me!”

“I-I see. Then I’ll strip too! That’ll make us even, right!?”

After letting go of the half dressed young lady, the older, more dangerous seeming lady began vigorously tossing away her clothes right in front of my eyes.

There might be certain issues with Claire’s personality, but she has an amazing body.

Her chest swelled far beyond what I expected as she removed her jacket and shirt.

Paying no heed to my intense stare, she quickly took off her trousers, leaving her clad in only her underwear.

I’ve only ever seen the white suited woman while she’s dressed like a man, but she sure is packing some amazing goods underneath.

Iris stripped down to her underwear too while Claire’s sight was averted.

Her skin is as unblemished and clear as porcelain. She’s a little too young right now, but she has a very promising future ahead of her.

“Right, now all the cloth that stood between us has vanished! Let’s have some skinship!”

“Your eyes are scaring me... What are you doing? You can’t join us if you don’t take off your clothes, you know?”

Looking at my still clothed form, the young girl pestered me to hurry up and take them off.

Rather than being suspicious of my clothed state, it’s more like she’s concerned over being alone in the baths with the other girl.

“I got... I understand.”

It’d be suspicious if I didn’t strip here. I carefully replied, making sure to use the appropriate language.

Even while taking off my unfamiliar clothes, I never took my sight off the two girls struggling with each other for even an instant.

Chapter 1

A Trade with that Tranquility Girl!

Part 1

I was free and didn't have any money, so I went to Sir Vanir's shop to play. However, the only thing that awaited me on my arrival was a silent glare.

Of course, I'm not the type of person who'd be scared away so easily, so I took a seat by the window.

Shortly thereafter, the beautiful shopkeeper came by with some tea and snacks.

It might be surprising to hear this, but Sir Vanir merely works part time at this store. Wiz is the one who actually owns it.

She's a beautiful, kind hearted and courteous former adventurer. A proper spellcaster who doesn't fire off Explosions around town.

"Welcome, Dust-san."

"Oh, pardon the intrusion."

"If you're going to intrude, then go home, man who's drowning in debts! Moi is desperately coming up with a way to pay off the landlord at the end of this month. Storekeeper who's a genius at wasting money, there's no need to give tea and snacks to someone who isn't a customer."

It seems like he's in a bad mood today.

I can sense Sir Vanir staring at me out of the corner of my eye, though I can't quite see his expression from behind his mask.

"How rude, Sir. I'm still a customer. I've plans to buy an item or two when I strike it big, so look forward to it. It's really a pity that my wallet is empty right now. I love gold,

but gold really hates me for some reason.”

“Moi is sure everything about you is disagreeable to gold.”

“You can’t say that to a customer, Vanir-san. Take your time.”

Wiz, who was surprisingly normal by the standards of this town, cheerfully smiled.

She really is a beauty. I always thought it was weird how she’s still single despite having both good looks and a decent personality.

There are even quite a few fans of her amongst the adventurers.

A few of them have been suspicious of her relationship with Sir Vanir ever since he started working here, but judging from how they interact from a day to day basis... That doesn’t seem very likely.

“Sir, do you know of some easy and relaxing way to earn money?”

“Moi dissolved into sand when Moi tried to break into the bank. It’s an easy way to make a lot of money, so why don’t you give it a shot?”

“It won’t be a joke if I get caught for that! I’ll be tossed into jail for life... Though, hold on. I’ll get a place to sleep and three meals a day, so it’s not entirely without merit...”

Jail is like my hotel room whenever I don’t have money.

I’m guaranteed a place to sleep and three meals, so it’s certainly an option. However, I won’t be able to make use of the succubus service while I’m in there.

“Unfortunately, I’ll have to reject that plan.”

“You shouldn’t be giving it serious thought in the first place. Isn’t accepting requests at the guild and properly working to complete them not what an adventurer ought to do?”

“*Sigh*, you don’t get it, Sir. Any idiot can work hard and earn money. I’m racking my brains to think of an easier way to make money. Isn’t it best to have money pile up even while you’re sleeping?”

A lifestyle where I'm surrounded by women, drink, and sleep is the best.

In order to realize that, I require money. But working hard for money doesn't particularly appeal to me.

"If such a method exists, Moi would've already been making use of it. This left on the shelf shopkeeper once again brought in a bunch of useless goods the other day. My head hurts just thinking about how to pay for it..."

"T-Those items will definitely increase in value! The merchant even said the price will go up by a hundred times in a century!"

She's trying to justify herself with tears in her eyes, but there's no way that'll work. Sir looks like he's fed up with it too.

"Wait a hundred years for a hundredfold increase... Well, that's fine."

"It's fine...?"

Sir put his hands on his forehead and sighed.

That's surprising. I thought he'd be angry at that.

Then again, I suppose a hundred years isn't that big of a deal to a greater devil like him.

"However, how long does the warranty on that magic item last for?"

"T-Ten years..."

Wiz withered in front of Sir's gaze.

"Have you forgotten a similar case that happened in the past? Just what exactly is stuffed into that skull of yours? Should I scoop it out and give it a good scrubbing!? I'm sure it's empty anyways!!"

"There's no way that can be true! Wait, did you just call me left on the shelf earlier?"

"Is that delayed reaction a sign of you going senile? Moi has heard that romance keeps human brains active, but that level of deterioration..."

“Even if it’s Vanir-san, I won’t forgive you if you continue!”

Wiz actually got angry for once, and Sir doesn’t look like he has any intention of backing down either.

A fight between a greater devil and a mage who was a famous former adventurer, huh? It won’t be a joke if I get dragged into it.

Seeing the writing on the wall, I started sneaking away to the entrance of the store.

“Hold on a moment. Your talk of money reminded me, but Moi has heard of a good get rich quick scheme.”

Sir ignored the still angry Wiz and stopped me.

Unlike the storekeeper, Sir does have a talent for making money, so he’s at least worth hearing out.

“Oh, seriously? Let me hear it. We can hash things out after you tell me how serious a crime I would be committing. I’ll have to get my money’s worth if I have to spend more than a week in jail.”

“Moi knew you’d be interested. Don’t worry, it’s nothing illegal. A good idea came to me while Moi was telling that guardian of problem children about the new goods.”

He’s referring to Kazuma, right?

I’ve recently heard some rumours that you can make a killing by working with Vanir on his money making schemes, so this should be good.

“Moi has no personal experience with this, but human girls are often worried about getting fat and frequently go on diets. Is that not right?”

“Yes, that’s true. Everyone cares about their figure, after all. For women, beauty and health are always on their mind.”

Wiz nodded after Vanir suddenly directed a question at her.

Come to think of it, Lynn often exercise restraint the day after we have a feast, doesn’t she?

“In that case, what would you do if there is a type of food that would not make you gain weight no matter how much of it you consume?”

“I would love to get my hands on it! But there’s no way such a convenient item can exist.”

“Fuhahaha! And what if it does exist?”

“Eh? If that’s really possible, it’ll definitely sell!”

Wiz confidently declared.

Judging from how enthusiastic she is, if such a thing really exists, women will definitely be all over it.

“But, I’m not doubting you, Sir, but does something that sounds so good really exist? You’ll definitely get fat if you eat that much, just like that Alderp’s belly.”

The image of the former lord of the town, Alderp, flashed through my mind.

He never was a particularly likable guy in the first place, but as it turns out, he truly was a piece of trash that came up with various schemes in order to force Darkness to marry him.

He went missing after his schemes were revealed and his entire fortune was seized. I wonder what he’s doing now.

“But it does exist. Food that will not make you fat no matter how much of it you consume. That’d be the tranquility girls.”

“Tranquility girls are those monsters, right? Sir, isn’t that a little cruel...”

“Vanir-san, that’s, err...”

Wiz and I responded at the same time.

Tranquility girls are plant type monsters that have an appearance resembling that of a young girl.

They are truly abhorrent monsters that attempt to elicit sympathy from travellers and

adventurers with their fragile looking forms. Once enthralled, you'd be held captive while you slowly weaken and die. Those who die end up becoming nutrients for the tranquility girl.

It does sound horrible, but since they kill without pain, there are quite a few people who willingly seek them out when they wish to move on.

The guild's official stance is that they are horrible monsters and recommends their immediate extermination.

"Moi thinks you two have some kind of misunderstanding. Moi is not saying to butcher tranquility girls and consume them. What Moi is after is the fruit that they create."

"Fruit?... Are you talking about the fruit that is said to instantly get you hooked from the moment you take a bite?"

"Indeed. Those fruits are delicious and filling, but has almost no nutritional value. Thus, no matter how much you eat, you'll never get fat. If we make some food with that as an ingredient, it is certain to be a great hit."

Huh, so tranquility girls produce those kind of fruits. I didn't know that.

...I see. Good thinking, Sir. True, if we use that, the creation of a dish that will not make you fat is possible.

"I have heard that they produce addictive fruits to weaken their prey and prevent them from escaping, but..."

"Way to go, Sir. That'd be the perfect ingredient. We'll definitely be rich."

"W-Wait, I've also heard that those fruits adversely affect the central nervous system. From what I can recall, they were called tranquility girls because they can shut off the sensations of pain, fatigue, and hunger and put their victims into a dreamlike state before their deaths."

Wiz, who was totally on board with us, suddenly raised an objection.

Is it really that dangerous of an item? That changes things. If we start selling that, the police definitely won't let it slide. It'd be a pretty major crime, in fact.

“Isn’t that really bad? If we get caught, we might end up in jail for life...”

“Selling something that dangerous really brings your humanity into question, Vanir-san!”

Wiz grabbed onto Sir and violently shook his body.

Vanir pried Wiz off him with an irritated expression and took a deep breath.

“In the first place, Moi is not human. Secondly, unlike you two, Moi is not a fool. Moi will not sell the fruit as it is. It is not my intention to cause the death of humans. The plan is to process it to remove the harmful components before selling it. For that reason, it is necessary to acquire a large amount of tranquility girl fruits.”

“So that’s my part in this.”

“It’s good that you’re quick to catch on. Don’t worry, Moi will give you the standard fee for taking on this request, including half in advance. How about it?”

It doesn’t seem like a bad deal. Even if he fails to find a way to remove the harmful components from the fruit, I would’ve already been paid, so that wouldn’t affect me.

If things go well, I might be able to help with the selling and earn even more money that way.

This request isn’t bad at all. In fact, it’s a very appealing, very profitable proposition.

“Delinquent who’s best suited for evil schemes, let me hear your answer!”

“There’s no need to even ask! Aren’t we close friends!? Heh, I shall gladly accept!”

Sir gave a satisfied laugh as I answered while rubbing my palms.

Though, the storekeeper still seemed to be on the fence about this idea as she restlessly paced about the store.

Part 2

When I returned to the guild with a heavy heart due to the looming deadline of my debts, coincidentally, my party members were all present, so I was able to tell them the details of the request on the spot.

I'll just leave out what Sir wants to do with them.

"So that's the story. He's offering to pay quite a bit for it, so you guys don't have a problem with it, right?"

"Aren't you the least bit afraid to accept a request from Vanir-san? Have you already forgotten what happened in Alcanretia?"

Lynn, who doesn't quite seem on board with the idea, stopped eating and twirled her knife around.

She's eating a salad again.

"Of course not. That only happened because Sir had a grudge against the Axis Cult. He often works with Kazuma to run a proper business."

"I've heard Kazuma made a lot of money thanks to that partnership."

"He probably bought the mansion he currently lives in with that money. Man, I'm so jealous."

Keith and Taylor seem to be a little more agreeable to this proposal.

Yeah, it ain't good to be so quick to doubt everything you come across like Lynn.

"Plus the request is simply to gather the fruits of a tranquility girl. We could take care of it at the same time and get the extermination bounty from the guild."

There aren't any requests to exterminate tranquility girls up at the moment, but we can still get paid as long as we bring back proof of the extermination.

"You're talking about those tranquility girls, right? I'm fine with accepting the request, but I'm not really looking forward to killing one, so let's just go for the fruits."

“I’ll pass on the extermination too.”

“Monster or no, I’m not stabbing a young girl.”

It doesn’t seem like my companions are too keen on killing one.

They might be monsters, but they do have the appearance of a young girl, so yeah, I understand why they’d hesitant.

“It’s a bit of a waste, but oh well. We’ll just negotiate with them for their fruits today. Don’t worry, apparently they can understand human words.”

It’s a pity to give up on the guild’s rewards, but the money offered by Vanir is more than enough. There’s no need to risk the ire of my companions.

“Still, where would we find a tranquility girl? I’ve heard rumours that there was one on the road between the Crimson Demon Village and Alcanretia, but apparently someone took care of it a while back.”

“Keith, is that true? A tranquility girl looks like a girl cute enough to trigger the protective instincts in anyone, right? Can someone really bring themselves to kill...”

Lynn frowned just imagining it.

An adventurer who can attack and slay a young girl... yeah, the only image that comes to mind is that of a hardened criminal.

“Yeah, I think I’ll pass on that too. I just can’t lay a hand on a kid. It’s impossible for a kind gentleman like me.”

“You mean a brute who’d hit on any woman you see, right!? The guy who did it must have been someone who has been constantly rejected by women and picked her to vent his frustrations on. Even I wouldn’t be able to stoop that low!”

As Keith drunkenly cursed the imagined assailant, I heard a loud clatter behind me.

Turning back, I saw a trembling Kazuma with an upturned tankard spilling its contents onto his table.

So Kazuma and co. were here too, huh.

“You know, you shouldn’t criticize him too much. It might look like a young girl, but it’s still a monster. Even if some people willingly seek them out wishing for a peaceful death, it’s still undeniable that it has killed a lot of people. You should be grateful to someone who does these necessary tasks that no one else is willing to do.”

As Taylor said soberly, Kazuma, who was quite a few tables over, got to his feet and made his way over to us.

“This is my treat, Taylor! Go ahead and drink to your heart’s content! You can order a few more snacks if you want!”

“Oh, I don’t really get it, but thanks. Don’t mind if I do.”

Kazuma left a tankard filled to the brim on the table before leaving.

“Hey, why only Taylor? Give your good friend some alcohol and snacks too!”

“No fair! Me too! Me too!”

“Yeah! You can treat an outsider, but you can’t treat your own companion? Where did your humanity go? Buy me the most expensive wine in this store!”

Keith and I started making a fuss, and the party priest seated at the other table joined in as well.

Kazuma looked at us and took a deep breath.

“I refuse!”

Dammit, it’s it because I went wild these past few nights?

Come to think of it, Taylor and Kazuma are pretty close, aren’t they? Every so often, I would catch them having a drink together.

Apparently, they have quite a bit in common from being the leaders of their respective teams. It seems like they often grumble about their companions over a few tankards of beer.

“Anyway, going back to the original topic, do you have any idea where we can find a tranquility girl?”

“We’ll have to ask Luna for that.”

I walked over to the bored looking Luna behind the counter, but I had to look down for a moment before calling to her.

Her assets are amazing as usual. When it comes to the size of her chest, she might be the number one in the guild, even taking all the adventurers into account.

Before I could properly appreciate her twin peaks, they were quickly hidden from view.

What’s the big deal? It’s not like they’d shrink or anything.

“Do you need something, Dust-san?”

“Those things really are an amazing treat for the eyes. I really wish Lynn could take after you.”

“If you’re just here for sexual harassment, then please leave before I call the cops.”

Even though I praised her, Luna covered her chest, completely hiding them from my sight.

You could just wear looser clothing around the chest if you really wanted to hide them.

“Come on, the police won’t come for something this minor. I know from experience. Anyway, do you have any information on tranquility girl sightings?”

“Could you be going out to exterminate them? Thank you very much!”

Luna bowed to me, causing her chest to jiggle.

Most of the adventurers who come to see Luna are men, and this sight is exactly why most of them choose to line up at her counter instead of someone else’s.

I didn’t have any intention of killing them, but I should just play along for now.

“Yeah, so I’d like to know where they are. I’ve heard that there was one close to Alcanretia.”

“That one has already been exterminated, but there’s been eyewitness reports of other tranquility girls around here...”

Saying that, she brought out a piece of paper from behind her counter.

On it is a map of their territory and breeding grounds. Cross marks probably represents those that have been eliminated.

“As mentioned earlier, the tranquility girl on this road was taken out by a certain adventurer some time ago.”

“Tranquility girls look almost exactly like a young human girl, right? Do you know what kind of person took it out?”

“We have been in contact. He’s registered under the Axel Branch of the Adventurer’s Guild, and is a very reliable adventurer who took the initiative to do jobs that others refuse to do. According to them, taking out a tranquility girl is surprisingly easy, so there’s no need to worry, Dust-san.”

I heard the clattering of chairs behind me. Turning around, I came across an angry seeming Kazuma trying to make his way to the counter, only to be restrained by Megumin and Darkness.

“Don’t joke with me! Do you know how tough it was!?”

His face is bright red... Did he have a few too many drinks?

Luna has a wide smile on her face. A lot of newbie adventurers get taken in by that smile of hers, but I know from experience that she is quite a schemer.

“Are you plotting something?”

“Not at all. Now, then, back to original topic, there’s been a tranquility girl spotted around this lake. It’s one of the water sources of this town, and it used to have problems with declining water quality, but ever since it was purified, it has turned into a beautiful place.”

Another clattering of chairs came from behind.

This time, it’s the blue-haired party priest, Aqua, squatting down with her hands on

her head.

“Inside the cage is best. Outside is scary... Outside is scary...”

“Ah, that trauma from back then resurfaced! Kazuma, do something!”

“I don’t wanna. It’s a pain. Just give her some beer and she’d be back to normal eventually.”

The Explosion Girl was panicking in front of Aqua, who was muttering something to herself while staring off into the distance.

Her only good point was being cheerful, so to see her depressed like this... Well, I guess such things do happen from time to time.

“So I can run into one if I head to that lake, right? Great, thanks!”

“Please stay on your guard. Most of the people who left to exterminate them were taken in by their appearance and couldn’t follow through.”

“Sure thing.”

My party didn’t have any intentions of taking them out, but the reward is surprisingly huge.

It’s certainly possible to kill it behind my party’s back and keep the prize money to myself. I’d be able to get paid twice. It’s certainly worth considering.

Part 3

The destination was quite close to town, so it didn’t take much time for us to arrive.

The lake was far larger, and far more beautiful, than I expected. Apparently, the rivers from the nearby mountains all end up here, making it an ideal water source.

“Oh~. If only I wasn’t on a job. This place looks perfect for a picnic and an afternoon nap.”

“Yeah, there isn’t even a single trace of monsters around here. It’s the very picture of peace.”

“Would there even be a tranquility girl here? Let’s just wash up and go home.”

My companions are completely in a holiday mood.

Keith let out a large yawn and carried himself almost as if he was about to lay down on the grass for a nap.

It’s peaceful, and the weather is great, so it’s is indeed a great day to laze around. If it wasn’t a job from Sir, I would’ve laid down and taken a nap.

“Let’s get it over and done with. From what I’ve heard, it lives in the forests next to the lake.”

“Right, let’s hurry up and get a move on. We just need to convince it, right?”

As we made our way around the lake, we occasionally sighted a few other adventurers.

It’s not just one or two of them. There are over a dozen in total, and it seemed like they are coming to and from the forest.

“Is there a really profitable monster living around here? Or perhaps this is a good spot to peep on bathing girls?”

“There’s no way they’d be here for something that stupid. But you noticed it too, huh. There seem to be a surprising number of adventurers around here... Taylor, do you know something?”

Lynn directed the question at Taylor, who wordlessly shook his head.

“Maybe there are Onion Ducks living around here. They like clean water, right?”

Surprisingly, Keith’s idea might be the most likely of them all.

Onion Ducks are weak, but they give a lot of experience points. On top of that, both their onions and their flesh taste delicious. They are a very worthwhile monster to hunt.

The adventurers who are glancing over to us are probably on the lookout to prevent any Onion Ducks from slipping by. In any case, there’s no need to keep watching them.

While ignoring the gazes of the other adventurers, we entered the forest.

We didn't have to walk long before encountering a sparsely grown clearing.

Sitting amongst the grass was a slim, green-haired girl who was looking at us with teary seeming eyes.

Its appearance was cute enough to trigger the protective instincts even in someone like me.



“A single girl alone this deep in the forest... Could she be the tranquility girl?”

“She looks just like a regular human. Is there no chance that she’s just lost?”

“So this is the lure, huh? It’s pretty impressive. If I didn’t know better, I would’ve been completely fooled.”

It’s understandable for Lynn and the others to be hesitant.

It’s pretty obvious what it is out here in the forest, but if I were to run into it sitting around in town, there’d be no way I could tell that it’s a monster.

“Umm, you’re a tranquility girl, right?”

In response to my words, the tranquility girl shyly nodded.

Then, looking up at me with slightly tear-stained eyes, it said in a halting manner.

“Are you people... here to kill me?”

“No, that’s not why we are here...”

Having her look at me with such innocent eyes caused a certain part of my heart to throb.

Ugh, so there was still that part of my conscience left...

After hearing such words from a defenseless little girl, anyone would lose the will to kill her.

I originally planned to secretly take care of her and get the reward from the guild, but I think I’ll pass on that after all.

There won’t be a problem with leaving a single monster out here. It’s not like she’s really threatening anyone.

“There’s no need to be scared, we aren’t here to do anything violent. We just came here to talk.”

“Yeah, yeah, we aren’t going to do anything, so don’t be afraid. We won’t let this barbarian do anything to you.”

Huh, Lynn's actually using the voice she uses when she plays with the stray cats in town.

"Talk?"

She placed a finger to her cheek.

Lynn gave her a kind smile in response. It seems like she has completely fallen for it.

Keith and Taylor hastily hid their weapons behind their backs to avoid scaring her. They are kind at heart, so it isn't surprising for them to react this way.

"We want the fruits you produce. Could you give us a few of them?"

"Ah, you're hungry. Give me a moment."

Saying that with a smile, she plucked a few fruits from under her dress and handed one to each of us.

At the same time, an expression of pain appeared across her features for a brief moment.

"Ah, you don't need to push yourself."

"Yeah, we won't demand the impossible. Your health comes first."

Lynn and Taylor hastily moved to stop her, but the tranquility girl simply smiled.

"No, thank you, kind onii-chan, onee-chan. Please help yourself if you are hungry."

Staring at the fruit in his hand, Keith wrapped an arm around me and whispered into my ear.

"Say, doesn't her way of speaking sound suspicious to you? She sounds just like someone who acts all innocent and tells her customers whatever they want to hear in order to get every last coin from their pockets"

"You caught onto that too, huh? It works on them because those two are simple, but it just reeks of an act to me. That gave is, how do I put it..."

Keith and I are of the same mind.

It sounds just like the ladies at the bar when they are trying to sell some expensive alcohol.

It might work when we're drunk and having a good time, but we're stone cold sober right now, so we can't help but catch onto the act.

I kind of understand why the guild regards them as dangerous monsters and recommends their extermination.

I decided to spare it, but it might actually be best to kill it right now.

Still, it didn't take long to get our hands on them. The fruit smelt really sweet when I took a sniff.

I haven't eaten anything decent recently, so it looks especially appealing, but... I just need to bear with it until I get the money from Sir.

We were able to successfully communicate with it, and it doesn't seem like it's about to attack us... Though it is trying really hard to get us to eat the fruit.

I expected it to be harder to complete, but it ended up being a snap.

"Well, thanks. Seeya."

"Huh!?"

That tone was completely different from the one it used earlier.

It seemed like it was too surprised to maintain its facade of a dainty girl.

"What, is it bad if we bring them back with us?"

"Umm, that fruit doesn't keep for long, so it won't be delicious if you leave it out. I've heard that it's delicious enough to make your cheeks melt when it's fresh, so I really recommend eating it now."

The tranquility girl seemed quite flustered as it tried to convince us to stay.

It's probably because it won't be able to turn us into nutrients if we don't eat them here. It might look like a girl, but it's still a monster.

“Nah. If we eat this, we would become addicted to it and won’t be able to leave, no?”

“Not at all. It’d just be really delicious.”

“Then it’s fine if we bring them back, right?”

The tranquility girl crossed its arms and made a soft, uh-nuh noise.

“Then, why don’t you take a bite?”

“Eh? Eating my own fruits is a little...”

It grimaced as I shoved the fruit towards it.

Well, I suppose it’d be like eating a portion of your own flesh.

As the tranquility girl made a scared expression, Lynn and Taylor pulled on the hem of my clothes.

“Don’t scare her. I’ll burn this idiot up with magic later, so don’t be afraid.”

“You shouldn’t treat a defenseless person so roughly. Don’t worry, as a Crusader, I’ll definitely protect you.”

The two of them stood in front of me as if to protect the tranquility girl.

Don’t be so easily fooled.

“Then let Keith take a bite.”

“Why me!? You eat it! You’ll eat leftover fish when you’re broke, so you’ll be fine no matter what you put in your stomach!”

“Don’t speak that badly of people! I’ve only ever eaten leftovers at the worst of times! Like, thrice at most!”

The moment I said that, my companions started inching away from me.

Not only that, but the tranquility girl too looked at me with pity in its eyes.

“H-Hey, you don’t need to be that surprised! If you smell something good coming from a trash bin when you’re broke, you’d succumb to temptation, right?”

“No I won’t.”

“Makes sense.”

“I’ll at least buy some bread for you if you’re really starving, so don’t do that anymore...”

“I’ll give you another two of my fruits.”

Dammit, having these guys offer me such kindness just makes me even more angry!

Ignoring the tranquility girl who offered me another pair of fruits, we finally left the area.

It might be better to take care of it now to prevent future adventurers from getting tricked, but right now, Sir’s request takes top priority.

Part 4

After returning to Axel, I headed off alone to report to Sir Vanir.

My companions seem to be a little wary of Sir, so I had them wait in the guild.

When I confidently opened the door, I came across the beautiful shopkeeper charred and twitching in the corner. Well, it’s a regular sight by this point, so I paid it no special heed.

Alongside her was Sir standing there with his arms crossed, and Loli Succubus dressed in her villager’s outfit.

“I’m back, Sir. And what are you doing here?”

“I had something to discuss with Vanir-sama. I just arrived a short while before you.”

She said in a sweet sounding falsetto. I’ve never heard her speak this way before.

...I think I’ve heard somewhere that Loli Succubus was a fan of Sir.

“Let’s start with the results of my request. You do not object, yes?”

“Of course, I can go second. I’m a reserved girl after all.”

It seems like Loli Succubus acts as meek as a lamb in the presence of Sir. She’s normally far more headstrong.

She’s looking at Sir Vanir with starstruck eyes, but Sir himself barely even acknowledged her presence... My condolences.

“Ah, well, I managed to get four of them, but that’s enough to fulfill the request, right?”

I placed the bag containing the fruits on the counter.

“Moi has indeed received them. Very well, the remaining sum... What’s the meaning of this?”

Sir cocked his head upon checking the insides of the bag.

Turning the bag inside out, Sir dumped a set of wrinkly-skinned fruits onto the counter. They were less than half the size they were when I first received them.

“Are these dried fruits?”

“Where they originally like this when you received them?”

“No, they were far more juicy looking. It’s really odd for them to dry up this much in less than half a day.”

Black patches have even started appearing on the skin. It doesn’t look the slightest bit delicious at all.

“Gurk! It stinks! It smells just like socks that haven’t been washed for three days!”

“Eeh? If Dust-san knows what that smells like... do you not wash your socks?”

Don’t pinch your nose and look at me like I stink, Loli Succubus! You’ll wear the same clothes for a few days when you go out on an adventure!

“Hmm, it seems like these fruits degrade extremely quickly. Was this to make it harder

for others to notice anything odd about these fruits? If that's the case, it's highly likely that the relevant components would've have degraded in the meantime."

"Seriously? Then didn't we just waste our time... Say, Sir, you're not going to ask me to return the money you gave me in advance, are you? I don't have a single eris left from that..."

I already brought the fruits, so I'd really like to just get the money and leave.

"Moi is not so petty of a person, but this is useless for my purpose. It seems like there might be no choice but to bring the tranquility girl itself to us."

"Pardon me for interrupting, but is that the fruit of a tranquility girl?"

"Yeah, I got some on Sir's request."

Loli Succubus grimaced as she stared at the fruit.

Why did this girl's mood turn sour so suddenly?

"What's the matter? Constipation?"

"What could possibly give you that idea? No, it's just, I came here to consult with Vanir-sama on something related to tranquility girls, so this was a strange coincidence."

"Oh? Now you've sparked my interest. Do continue."

Sir returned the fruits to the bag as he said that. The entire store will be filled with the stench of rotting fruits if he were to leave it in the open.

Though, it doesn't seem the bag is thick enough to prevent the stench from spreading.

After thinking it through for a brief moment, Vanir tied up the bag and threw it next to Wiz who was still curled up on the floor.

Wiz jumped up slightly upon taking a whiff of the bag, but otherwise had no further reaction.

...I'm a little curious as to what he's up to this time, but I guess I should listen to Loli Succubus first.

“The truth is, quite a few of our long time customers stopped showing up recently. We looked into it, and apparently, they’ve stopped showing up at the adventurer’s guild entirely. The other adventurers said that it isn’t that surprising for a few adventurers to slack off after the recent windfalls.”

Yeah, between the bounties from the Demon King’s General and the Hydra, an adventurer would be able to live leisurely even without working for quite some time.

In my case, I used up all the money fairly quickly, so I’m still as broke as ever.

Actually, now that she mentions it, there are a few faces that have completely disappeared from the guild.

“When we looked a little deeper into it, we discovered that all of the adventurers who stopped visiting us had something in common. All of them accepted a request to take out a tranquility girl!”

“But the tranquility girl is still there.”

“It would appear that all of them failed to carry through.”

Sure, taking down a tranquility girl requires more courage and ruthlessness than actual skill with arms, but if you send a dozen or so adventurers after one, you’d think that at least one of them would be willing to take the plunge.

If all of them really did disappear after heading out after the tranquillity girl, it would be quite the incident indeed. I should ask around at the guild. They might be offering some sort of bonus reward for resolving the problem.

“I’ll ask Luna for more details. I’m not done with this request yet.”

“You have an admirable attitude for once. Moi shall also think of a measure to get my hands on fresh fruits.”

“I’ll help Vanir-sama too! I’m a capable girl, after all.”

“In that case, would you mind throwing that large piece of garbage into the warehouse? It would get in the way of the customers.”

Loli Succubus started obediently dragging Wiz away to the back of the store at Sir

Vanir's command.

I do feel a little sorry for her, but considering how often she wastes Sir Vanir's hard earn money, I suppose such treatment is only to be expected.

Part 5

"Tsk, they didn't wait for me. What a heartless bunch."

My companions weren't around by the time I returned to the guild. They either went back to their rooms or are out in town somewhere.

I felt stupid for seriously working while they were slacking off, so I moved to order a drink.

But then I remembered that I didn't have any money.

The tavern is pretty sparse for once, so there's no one I can sponge a drink off of.

"Give me a drink and put it on my tab."

I said to one of the waitresses as she passed by, and she snorted in response.

"Huh? Save your jokes for when you're drunk. You haven't even paid up on last month's tab. We've been discussing if it's about time to bar you from the premises."

"You're joking... right? You're just joking, right? If I can't enter the guild, I won't be able to take on any quests!"

"Who knows? Hey, don't try and cop a feel! Just hurry up and clear your tab!"

As I clung onto the waitress's waist, she smacked me on the head with the serving tray and left.

Dammit, I'm a customer, you know!? Don't get ahead of yourself just because I can't pay!

Though, yeah, that's my fault.

Well, it wouldn't do much good to just stand there, so I moved over to Luna who was

busy cleaning the counter and struck up a conversation.

“Oh, you don’t look too bad with your ass sticking out like that either.”

“You know, I might seriously consider suing you.”

She immediately turned around and glared at me.

“Hey, come on, isn’t it pretty admirable that I didn’t lay a hand on you?”

“The mindset of a criminal is really scary indeed. Anyway, if you’re just here to get in the way, then please go elsewhere.”

Don’t make shooin motions at me.

I really would like to give her a piece of my mind, but it’d be difficult to continue working as an adventurer if I made an enemy out of her.

“Don’t be so cold-hearted. I’m here to get more details regarding the tranquility girl.”

“Ah, now that you mentioned it, how did the extermination go!?”

Oh, so that got her attention alright.

“Ah, about that, we did find one, but my companions didn’t want to go through with it, so I had to stay my hand.”

“So you couldn’t go through after all. Given its looks and way of speaking, it’s hard for anyone who’s kind at heart to take care of it. I had hoped that Dust-san would be capable of handling it...”

“Hey, what’s that’s supposed to mean?”

“It’s exactly as I’ve said.”

T-This girl actually said that with a smile.

One of these days, I’m going to make her tell me exactly what kind of person she thinks I am, but I have more important matters right now.

“Ah~, and here I was all hyping myself up to take out that tranquility girl, but nevermind. *Sigh*. I just can’t get the motivation to go through with this.”

“W-Wait a minute! I’ll apologize for my earlier statement, so can you please take care of it!? We are really in a bind here! On top of all the requests piling up because the adventurers have taken to slacking off, most of the adventurers who accept this task don’t return, so we are really in a bind!”

Luna clung onto me, allowing me to enjoy the sensation of her large breasts pressing against my body. It seems like she’s really at her wit’s end.

Oh, it might be nice to stay like this for a while.

“Are you really in that much of a bind?”

“Yes, we are! Including the people we sent to check up on those who went missing, the number of people who don’t come back just keeps going up... And the female adventurers wouldn’t take this task...”

So what Loli Succubus told me was true. Did the adventurers end up getting entrapped by the tranquility girl?

“Lynn was the same. It seems like women won’t be able to kill something like that.”

My companions too were taken in by its appearance and speech. The only people who can kill a tranquility girl would be someone who’s really strong at heart, or a truly horrible person.

“I appealed to the adventurer who took down a tranquility girl before, but he turned me down. He said that he doesn’t want to get involved with them again after psychological wounds he suffered the previous time...”

“Yeah, it’s pretty tough to kill something that looks that much like a human.”

She must be talking about the adventurer who killed the tranquility girl near Alcanretia.

I thought that he would have a heart of steel, but I suppose it’s still too much to ask him to do it again.

“The one found at the lake is particularly troublesome. I’ve heard that it’s really good at worming into your heart with words. Just what should I do...”

During her musings, Luna never took her upturned eyes off me.

Did she also push her body against mine on purpose?

Come now, I’m not going to fall for such an obvious seduction attempt.

“If you were to accept the request...”

She pushed her body even closer to me, to the point where my arm is almost entirely enveloped by the softness.

Gah, this is bad. No man can stand firm in the face of such softness. It feels like my sense of reason is floating away.

“If you accept...”

I gulped and waited nervously for her next word.

“I’ll tell the tavern to extend your tab for another month.”

“I’ll do it.”

I instantly accepted.

Part 6

“Ah, dammit, what do I do about this?”

I still had the request from Sir to complete, so I thought we could kill two birds with one stone, but all my companions said no when I brought it up to them.

It seemed like they had enough after meeting with the tranquility girl once. They turned a deaf ear upon everything I said.

Afterwards, I tried broaching the topic to several of the adventurers I know, but not a single one of them hopped on board.

And the reasons are-

“Dust’s money making ideas aren’t reliable in the slightest.”

“She looks just like a girl, doesn’t she? No way.”

“Nevermind that, just pay me back already.”

And etc etc. Actually the last one turned from a discussion into a fistfight.

I wanted to get some beer to ease my mood, but I didn’t even have the money to do that. I tried searching for someone who would treat me, but Kazuma wasn’t around.

I can take out a tranquility girl by myself, no problem. The problem is travelling to where it is. Goblins and such can be easily taken care of, but it’d be really problematic if I ran into a Rookie Killer or the like along the way.

Well, just thinking about this isn’t bringing me anywhere, so I pulled up a chair and called for a waitress.

“Hey, can I make an order?”

“It’s fine as long as you pay up.”

“Tsk, fine, give me some water. That’s free, right?”

“Well, I suppose.”

“You can mix in some alcohol into as well!”

When I said that, she stuck her tongue out and walked away.

Well, there wasn’t much else for me to do, so I placed my feet on the table and stared at the ceiling.

“Is there anyone who would go on an adventure with me...”

As I mumbled, I noticed something moving at the corner of my vision.

The lonely Crimson Demon who pretty much held the window seat as her own

personal territory stole several glances at me.

She wasn't here when I was asking around for companions. She was probably getting into another argument with Kazuma's Explosion Girl again.

...It seems I've secured a party member. As long as I keep the fact that we are going after a tranquility girl a secret, I'm sure she'll be willing to tag along.

I'll be able to ensure my safety with Yunyun around. Though, I suppose I should confirm it.

"I wonder if there's a kind and strong and cool mage hanging around who rescues people in trouble~?"

I said that in a voice loud enough for her to hear, and Yunyun could barely contain her smile as she stood up.

She has taken the bait. It's so easy that I might even start yawning.

The person in question seemed utterly ignorant of my intentions and boldly walked over to my table.

As I tried to keep my face as straight as possible to prevent her from noticing,

"Did you ask for me!?"

The Explosion Girl appeared at my table.

It seems like she entered the guild at the absolute worst possible time.

"I didn't ask for you! Hey, Kazuma, she's being a bother!"

"What's with that treatment! As the foremost mage of the Crimson Demons-"

"Sorry. Hey, I told you not to cause trouble for others!"

Kazuma dragged the Explosion Girl away by her collar.

She waved her staff around and struggled against his grip, but then she suddenly quietened down.

“Using Drain Touch isn’t fair!”

“Shut up! Your level is so high that you won’t come along unless I do this! Hey, Darkness, stop giving me such envious looks!”

“If you want to vent your frustrations, you can use my body to its fullest. There’s no need to hold back. If you want, you can even use Bind to restrain me...”

“Hey, can I order the most expensive wine in this store? Hey. I said hey! Don’t ignore me!”

They were as lively as always.

The guild that was silent just a short while ago turned rowdy in an instant.

Kazuma sat down a few tables over with an exasperated expression on his face and ordered something. I’ll go sponge something off him later.

The thought crossed my mind to let Kazuma and co. help out, but... let’s not.

It’d be hard to kill it in a party with so many women. Plus, I get the feeling that something horrible will happen if I bring them along.

Turning my sights away from Kazuma, I noticed Yunyun who has been blankly standing there after she lost the chance to talk to me.

You know, she should really used to calling out to me already. There really is no need to be so guarded against me.

“What’s the matter, Yunyun? Do you need something?”

“Umm... Err... you were saying something about an adventure earlier...”

She trailed off, fidgeting all the while.

She really is a troublesome person to deal with.

“*Sigh...* If you have time, would you like to help me with a quest?”

“If you desperately need my help, I wouldn’t mind tagging along!”

Seeing her face brighten up like that made me want to tease her.

“Well, I’m not desperate or anything.”

“Eh? B-But, weren’t you troubled over not having enough people earlier?”

“It ain’t like this task is something I absolutely cannot do by myself.”

“I-I happen to be free, so I’ll help you out! There’s no need to stand on ceremony!”

If you’re that desperate, you should’ve just been honest from the start.

So this is why that Explosion Girl likes to mess with her.

“Well, if you are going to go that far, then sure. Now, let’s have a party to celebrate! It’ll be your treat!”

“No! If you don’t have money, then just drink some water!”

“Please just let me eat something with flavour already! Ice is chewy, but it won’t fill your belly!”

“I don’t know anything about that!”

“I do! Oh, and if you put some sugar on it, you can fool yourself into thinking you are snacking on something.”

The Explosion Girl loudly interjected out of nowhere.

“Megumin!?”

“I thought there was nothing in your head apart from explosions, but you do get it, don’t you!?”

“You have some guts to think of me who is regarded to have high common sense amongst the Crimson Demons as a fool. Why don’t I gift your brain with a dose of Explosions too!?”

“How did we start talking about this!? Hey, don’t use Explosion magic indoors!”

Yunyun hastily grabbed Megumin as she started waving her staff around.

Looking behind her, I saw Kazuma and Aqua nonchalantly sharing a drink.

“Kazuma, the problem child is going crazy! Please do something!”

“Don’t worry, she already used Explosion today, so she doesn’t have any mana left.”

If Kazuma says so, then it should be fine. I’ll just leave her for Yunyun to deal with.

It’s starting to get late, so I guess I’ll leave the rest to tomorrow. And Kazuma’s here as well, so I might be able to get away with ordering a few mugs of beer.

I’ll be able to earn quite a bit of money with Sir’s deal, so a simple bar tab shouldn’t be a big deal.

Part 7

“Good morning, Sir Vanir.”

“According to my all-seeing eyes, the sun is already far above our heads.”

“Good morning, Dust-san.”

Having woken up late after drinking my fill the previous night, I dragged myself to Wiz’s magic item store to see an apron-clad Sir Vanir and a perfectly healthy-looking Wiz.

“I really slept in after filling my belly thanks to Kazuma. Anyway, Sir, what should I do about the tranquility girl’s fruits?”

“Moi has thought of an idea, but before that, tell me about what you learnt from the guild.”

“Ah, sure. According to what I’ve heard from Luna-”

Sir folded his arms and after I relayed everything to him.

“Now, isn’t this a troublesome situation?”

“It seems to line up with what the small succubus said.”

“Did Loli Succubus say something?”

Sir Vanir let out a huge sigh.

“Didn’t she say that adventurers have stopped coming to her store yesterday, delinquent whose mind is filled with nothing but wine and women?”

“Don’t praise me too much, I’m blushing.”

“That wasn’t praise, Dust-san.”

Wiz denied it with a wry smile.

Come to think of it, Loli Succubus did say something like that yesterday, didn’t she? My memory is a little fuzzy thanks to all the beer I drunk last night.

“Moi has come across a few more details since then. One of the adventurers came back and went back to the succubus store. Apparently, those who were sent out to take care of the tranquility girl lost their nerve and ended up as bodyguards for her. What a pitiful fate.”

“Don’t tell me those idiotic adventurers will get in the way if I try and exterminate her...”

“That would appear to be the case. Now then, Moi has a wonderful idea. You should visit the succubi. You shall make a wonderful memory there!”

With a wide smile, Sir Vanir directed me to visit the Succubus shop.

He probably has some kind of plan, so I’ll do as he says for now.

Leaving the magic item shop behind, I made my way over to the ordinary looking cafe that served as the succubus store and came across the succubi lounging around.

This store is emptier than I’ve ever seen it. It seems like they are really feeling the effects of the reduced number of adventurers frequenting the store.

“Ah, Dust-san! We’ve been waiting for you!”

Loli Succubus welcomed me and showed me to my seat, and started bringing out drinks and snacks before I ordered anything.

And not only that, but the other succubi crowded around me and started pouring drinks and massaging my shoulders and basically giving me a wonderful welcome.

“I don’t know what you’re doing, but I’ll say this in advance: I have no money.”

“It’s on the house, so don’t worry.”

Loli Succubus was looking at me with a gentle smile that I’ve never seen her use before.

...Her smile didn’t reach her eyes, so I couldn’t help but be unnerved.

The other succubi who were fawning over me had the very same smiles.

They poured me wine I didn’t order and a large-breasted Succubus tried to get me to drink.

Two others pressed their bodies against me from both sides, allowing me to take in the full extent of their chests.

...I should secure my escape route.

“It’s pretty quiet in here today, huh? You’re not in any trouble, are you? And I really have no money. If you want, I can show you the insides of my wallet.”

“Why are you so nervous?”

“What else can I be? There’s no such thing as a free lunch in this world.”

“There’s no need to be so guarded. You’ve already seen me naked at the hot springs...”

A shiver flowed down my spine.

Seriously, your smile doesn’t reach your eyes at all.

The two of them by my sides whistling and saying “Way to go.” in such an obvious, practiced manner just makes things even scarier.

Feeling the breaths of those two as they leaned in close gave me the flutters, but I just couldn't get worked up seeing their eyes.

"Your eyes are seriously scary! I don't need any strange persuasion methods, so just lay it on me!"

"Is that so? The truth is, there's something we would like you to do."

The succubi moved in closer.

Normally I would be overjoyed to be surrounded by so many scantily clad women, but there's definitely something up with this.

Part 8

After returning to the guild, Luna told me that the sooner it's exterminated, the sooner she can give me the reward, so I set off early the next morning.

Apart from me, the party included Yunyun, Loli Succubus, and-

"Dust-san! Who are those people!?"

"You've met several times, haven't you? She's Loli Suc-... Lolisa."

"I know Lolisa, but what's with that crowd of robed people behind you!?"

She grabbed me by the shoulders and violently shook me.

This girl loses her composure really easily whenever something unexpected happens.

There's just a little over a dozen succubi in hooded robes, what's the big deal?

"My apologies, Yunyun-san. These people are my co-workers. They were planning on returning to the village that's close to the lake, and I thought that they'd be safe if they could tag along with my reliable mage senpai. Yunyun-san... They are not a bother, are they?"

"N-Not at all! A reliable senpai, huh~? I'm sure no one told that to Megumin before~. I'll need to write a letter to Funifura and Dodonko later!"

Yunyun's face lit up and she happily wobbled back and forth.

She fell right for it. Loli Succubus has gotten really good at handling Yunyun.

It'd be difficult for me alone to protect all of them, but it'd be fine if Yunyun was with us. And this situation is-

"This is a genuine harem party!"

Even Kazuma would be jealous if he were to see this. I'll brag about this to him later.

Apart from me, this party is entirely filled with women. And they are all beautiful with great bodies... Well, not including Loli Succubus.

It'd be nice if she had a little more flesh around her chest and butt, but right now she looks no different from a kid.

"I just felt a really unpleasant gaze just now."

"It's probably just your imagination."

That was close, I think she almost noticed that I was comparing her to the other succubi.

The one bad thing about this situation is that all of the succubi were wearing robes that hid their figures. If they were wearing their usual outfits, this entire adventure would've been heaven.

I was worried over what kind of unreasonable request they'd make of me last night, but I'm really thankful for this.

To think that they wanted to come with me in order to bring back their customers with their own hands. It seemed like it brought no small amount of shame on them to have their customers charmed away by another monster.

Thinking of a way to deal with those other adventurers was giving me a headache too, so it suits my purposes just fine.

"Oh. Dust-san, here's the wine you asked for in place of advance payment. The alcohol content is pretty high, so don't drink it on the way, okay?"



“Ah, thank you. I think I’ll be able to see some sweet dreams tonight.”

I placed the bottle of wine into my bag.

“Leave the monsters to me! I won’t let them lay a single scratch on you!”

Yunyun seemed much more confident after getting the attentions of the succubi.

With this, the monsters that we might encounter along the way would be easily taken care off. Seems like I’ll have an easy journey ahead of me.

“Light of Saber!”

Yunyun’s more spirited-than-usual magic flashed through the air, taking out the enemy in a single strike.

This caused the succubi to crowd around her with cheers and applause and put a slight blush upon her cheeks.

We ran into monsters several times during our journey, but apart from Yunyun, none of us even needed to fight.

“Man, it’s really relaxing out here.”

“Why don’t you put in a little work too, Dust-san?”

Loli Succubus, who was walking next to me, said something stupid.

“You just don’t get it. That girl is an eternal loner who does nothing except play games by herself or read books. I’m bringing her out to someplace sunny and letting her receive the praise of the masses. Me giving up the spotlight to her is necessary for her mental health.”

“That sounds so very suspicious.”

I guess it doesn’t sound convincing when I’m saying it while snacking.

Still, I suppose I should give her a few words of gratitude too. It is true that her presence made my work a whole lot easier.

“Good work out there. Here, help yourself to some snacks.”

“Thank you. You’re pretty thoughtful for... Hey, aren’t these my snacks!?”

“I just took them out from that bag over there.”

“That’s my bag! How could you just ruffle through a girl’s luggage!? My change of clothes and underwear are in there too!”

“It’s just a day’s trip, you didn’t need a change of clothes or underwear. And I have no interest in a brat’s underwear anyway.”

I gazed out over at the lake that just became visible a short while ago while weathering her complains.

There were three men drawing water from the lake today. It’s a little hard to tell from this distance, but they seem more like mountain bandits than adventurers.

“Hmm? I think I’ve seen them somewhere before...”

I squinted, but they are too far away to make out any details.

After filling their buckets with water, the three of them headed back into the forest.

“Hey, are you even listening!?... Did you see something?”

“I feel like I’ve seen those three somewhere before.”

“Those three who are heading into the forest? I can only see their backs, so I can’t be sure.”

“They... do look a little familiar... hmm...”

Yunyun has no impression of them, but Loli Succubus seems to have the same feeling as me.

Well, they’re probably long time customers of the succubus shop.

Letting my eyes scan across the lake, I noticed a few other adventurers seemingly keeping watch around the banks. A few of them seem to have noticed us and are

looking directly in our direction.

The surprised look on their faces is probably due to the troupe of robed succubi amongst us. It doesn't look the slightest bit like any adventuring party. We must have seemed like some weird cult dressed up like this.

"Right, let's go to where we last met her."

"Oh, yeah, I totally forgot, but what monster did we come here to exterminate? A monster that lives around such a beautiful lake... you're not hunting Onion Ducks, are you!? Dust-san won't do the same sort of stuff as Megumin, right!?"

Yunyun screamed in a panic.

I have no idea why she's so worked up, but I probably should calm her down.

"We aren't hunting Onion Ducks. It's, uh, you know, that plant monster. The vicious ones that entraps humans in order to use them as nutrients."

That wasn't a lie.

"I-Is is really that vicious?"

"Don't be fooled by her appearance! That's a cold-hearted and calculating woman! A bitch in sheep's clothing!"

Loli Succubus shouted from behind, and the other succubi voiced their agreement as well.

Well, to them, tranquillity girls are a rival-like existence that steals their customers.

"Calculating? Cold-hearted?"

Yunyun seems confused about the terms they used to describe it.

I can just picture her complaining if I were to explain things to her, so let's just carry on.

We went around the lake to reach the forest, but just before we could enter the forest itself, a bunch of people jumped out onto the path.

“The path ahead is closed.”

Over ten armoured men formed a line in front of us.

“What are you guys doing?”

“Eh? They’re all guys I’ve seen in the guild.”

Well, it’s no surprise that Yunyun would recognise them. She spends most of her time sitting in the guild, and they’re all people who didn’t come back after being sent out on the extermination quest.

Guess Loli Succubus was telling the truth after all.

“Geh, it’s the delinquent Dust.”

“This guy doesn’t know what mercy means. He’ll definitely do it.”

“He’s the sort of person who’d kill even women and children if someone pays him enough.”

“I’m standing right here, you know!?”

I’ve remembered your faces! I’ll definitely spread some bad rumours about you all back in the guild!

I would really like to give them a good thrashing, but there’s just too large a difference in our numbers. The succubi can’t be relied upon in combat, so that just leaves the loner.

“Right, Yunyun, blow these guys away with your magic.”

“W-Wait a minute! You guys are adventurers, right? We’re just here to exterminate a monster, so could you let us pass?”

“We really can’t let you through after hearing that. If you insist, you’ll have to go through us.”

These guys are completely in the palm of the tranquility girl.

They'll be taken care of in an instant if Yunyun uses her magic...

"What's going on, Dust-san? Why are those people protecting a monster..."

"They are being controlled by magic. After falling for the monster's enchantments, they're being used as pawns to get in our way."

"H-How despicable! I won't forgive them!"

I'm a little worried over how easily duped Yunyun is, but right now, this suits my purposes fine right now.

"Hey, don't you guys have any shame over being used by a monster? You're still adventurers, right? To fall for the lies of your target... seriously, what kind of adventurers are you?"

I sighed and shrugged my shoulders.

A few of them turned red and raised their voice in response to my provocations.

"I don't want to hear that from you!"

"You are the one who's a bigger disgrace to the guild!"

"Committing sexual harassment and causing trouble everyday! Just how much pain do you think you've brought to Luna's huge breasts!"

These little...

"I wanted to conclude this peacefully, but screw it. Go get them, Crimson Demon Loner. Use Lightning Saber!"

"Please don't call me by strange names!"

I pointed at them and shouted my command, but Yunyun didn't follow through.

With Yunyun floundering, it ended up as a staring match.

Should I get the battle started so that she has no choice but to use her magic?

Just as I gathered my resolve and was about to jump in, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

“Leave this to us, take Yunyun-san and go!”

Loli Succubus said with a determined expression.

Oh yeah, these guys came here to bring back the adventurers.

“You guys can handle this, right?”

“Yes!”

Well, if they have so much confidence, I can leave it in their hands.

These guys shouldn’t be able to bring themselves to harm a Succubus.

“Right, we’re leaving this to them! Let’s go, Yunyun!”

“W-Wait, didn’t you say that those girls can’t fight?”

I grabbed on her arm and started running, but she wasn’t entirely cooperative.

Explaining things now would just create new problems, so I’ll just spin a convenient lie.

“Ah, the truth is, those guys are the wives and girlfriends of those who went missing out here. They came out here to bring them back. It’s kind of embarrassing, so we kept it a secret. Sorry.”

“Is that so...? I see, in that case, we need to hurry up and defeat the monster to free them from the spell!”

Yunyun grabbed my hand and charged straight into the forest.

It’s fine to have a strong sense of justice, but you’ll get tricked by some strange men if you aren’t a little more suspicious about such stories. It really is a good thing I’m such a morally just fellow.

A few of the adventurers hurriedly chased after us, and a couple more jumped out to

block out path.

“That girl seems kind, so she’s fine, but we’ll never let you pass!”

True, if it were Yunyun alone, I can definitely see her being easily won over.

It’ll be really bad if I don’t find a way to shake them somehow. Should I just beat on the guy in front of me and make a hole that way?

When I was thinking of that, the sound of cloth being flung away came from behind me.

“Wha-!?”

...Why are these people staring behind me with their mouths agape.

I turned around.

Standing right there were the succubi wearing just the bare minimum amount of cloth needed to cover their important bits.

“Wooooah!”

A loud cheer rang out through the forest. I can’t help but raise my voice too.

There’s no way I could tear my eyes off those succubi striking such erotic poses in that outfit.

“Why don’t you guys stop protecting the tranquility girl and come back to Axel with us~? Right now, we’ll give you a 30% discount coupon for the next~ half~ year~”

“If you come with us now, we’ll give you plenty of service, and not just in your dreams either~”

The succubus said such sweet sounding words while thrusting their chest and ass in all the right directions.

Ah, dammit, I want to drop everything and join them too.

However, even In the face of such seduction, the adventurers still put up a valiant

defence.

“N-No, we have to protect that poor girl!”

Do these guys not know the true nature of the tranquility girl?

“Never mind protecting, if you stay here, you’ll die. ”

“Huh, what are you saying? We are properly eating the fruits, so we are as healthy as we can be!”

“Wait, do you guys not know that the fruit of a tranquility girl doesn’t have any nutrients? Just eating it alone won’t replenish your energy.”

The damned fools looked at me with a blank look on their faces.

They were entirely taken in by the tranquility girl’s acting and the hallucinatory properties of the fruits.

“Don’t say such foolish things. We aren’t stupid enough to fall for such an obvious lie.”

“You are stupid! Do you guys not know the first thing about a tranquility girl?”

All of them tilted their heads. It ain’t cute when a man does it. It’s just creepy.

Well, the tranquility girl is a pretty famous monster, but not many people run into them, so I suppose this is to be expected. I myself didn’t know much about them before I got involved with this case.

“Come to think of it, I have slimmed down recently...”

“Well I did think it’s strange why my body started becoming sluggish even though I’m getting lighter. Is all that lost weight because I’ve started losing muscle?”

“And here I thought it was a good thing that I could tighten my belt by another notch...”

And everyone started noticing the various abnormalities with their bodies.

Did they seriously not notice it until now?

Still, perhaps because of their lingering sympathies, or perhaps the remnants of the fruits left in their systems, they still couldn't bring themselves to take action.

But they did start slowly moving towards the succubi. This is probably their instincts as men at work.

After all, they've been alone out here for quite some time. It'd be really hard for them to resist the effects of seduction right now.

Right, I can leave things to them.

"Hey, wait, do you guys intend to abandon that girl so easily!?"

The one who screamed that is a passionate looking man surrounded by two other men who seem to be his companions.

Wait, those three are...

"You fuckers again!?"

"That's my line! Why do you have to butt in every time we try and get some healing time with a beautiful girl!?"

The man sporting a scraggly beard was the former leader of that band with strange tastes that I happen to keep running into.

"Hey, Lolicons, you'll just complicate things, so don't butt in. On account on the fact that we once fought side by side, I'll let you off today, so hurry up and scram!"

"Huh!? We have no business with a granny lover like you! Hold firm, everyone! A pure and unsoiled girl is far more attractive than those women who show off their skin without shame!"

Those words seem to have struck a nerve with the succubi.

"What's with this rude man!? Would you like to be shredded!?"

"A ripened fruit is far more delicious than an unripened one!"

Despite suffering the angry gazes of the succubi, the three of them snorted without a

fear in the world.

“See? Old folks have no time left, so they are quick to lose their temper! A younger girl would laugh and go ‘you’re quite amusing, oji-chan.’ I’m sure you all understand the beauty of a young girl!”

In response to the passionate cries of the three of them, the other adventurers started slowly edging away.

“No, we’re not exactly lolicons...”

“Yeah, we’re normal.”

The appeal of their boss seemed to have the opposite effect, and the adventurers who were on the fence before started shifting towards the succubi.

A few of them are still staying put, but their numbers have been reduced by about half.

“So you stayed, comrade!”

“We properly received your passion!”

There must be something really wrong with your brain to be moved by that.

“Ah, Dust-san, those people are the customers who always request for me!”

Loli Succubus repeatedly smacked me on the back as she pointed at them.

“Yeah, of course.”

So that’s why they didn’t fall for the succubi’s seductions. Other than Loli Succubus, everyone else has a properly filled out body, so they don’t exactly fit their tastes.

That makes things simple.

“Hey, if you make an enemy of them, they’ll make sure to send you all a dream each night where you are being pursued by grannies! Don’t say I didn’t warn you!”

“I’m sorry, please forgive me!” x4

Ignoring those who immediately got down on all fours and prostrated themselves, I ran past them after Yunyun.

Shit, they delayed me at the most crucial moment. If I don't hurry, things will get really troublesome.

Part 9

After pushing past the adventurers, I proceeded deep into the forest and ran back to the same spot where I last encountered the tranquility girl.

Getting here didn't pose a problem, but there's a most troublesome person standing in front of me.

"Dust-san! How could you bring yourself to kill such a poor child! I always thought you were scum, but I didn't think you were this heartless!"

Yunyun screamed at me through tears.

"Oh, shut up! Just what kind of person do you think I- Tsk, fine."

It's an outcome so obvious that I can't even bring myself to be surprised.

When you leave that devious tranquility girl alone with the easily-tricked Yunyun, well, this is the natural result.

"Aah~, it must have been easy for you to trick this loner."

"...What do you mean?"

The tranquility girl answered in a halting, uncertain manner.

Yeah, it's easier to tug at other's heartstrings if you pretend to be a child.

"This girl might be a monster, but she merely keeps those who wish to die company in their last days and sends them off peacefully! She didn't do anything wrong!"

"Just assisting suicide is evil enough as it is. Plus, do you really think she only targets people who want to die? Do those idiots earlier look suicidal to you?"

“Eh, um, they always seem to have a fun time in the tavern, but... That’s not true, right?”

Yunyun turned around and addressed the tranquility girl.

The tranquility girl returned with a tearful gaze that just screams ‘please believe me’. Those tears are probably sap or something.

“Onee-chan... Do you think I’m lying...? You would believe that thug-like person with the evil looking eyes...”

“N-Not at all! I’m the idiot for almost believing that trashy human in the first place. I believe you, so don’t cry.”

Turning her back on me, Yunyun hastily tried to comfort the girl.

There must really be something wrong with you to believe a monster’s words over someone you’re familiar with.

I wanted to say a lot of things, but I merely snuck behind Yunyun and delivered a strong blow to the back of her head.

“Eh?”

It’s not because her earlier words irked me.

I carried the collapsed Yunyun over to a spot a short distance away from the tranquility girl.

“W-What are you doing!? You raised a hand against your own companion!?”

“I merely knocked her out. There’d be a lot of problems otherwise. Anyway, there’s just the two of us now.”

“Eep! What do you intend to do with a defenseless girl!? You would do such things even with a monster!? Don’t throw away your humanity just because you aren’t popular with women!”

“Hell no! And you’re a monster disguised as a little brat. I’m not like the others, so that sort of appeal won’t work on me.”

It might look like a human, but that doesn't change the fact that it's a monster.

As long as you keep in mind that everything's an act, there's nothing to fear.

"S-Save me! This scum like man is about to force himself on me-!"

"Who the hell are you calling scum!? There's no point in yelling. All those people you've charmed are probably having the time of their lives with the succubi right now."

"Eh, there are succubi here too? Those things put on a completely different face whenever men are involved."

It fearfully looked around. It seems like it is no longer calm enough to keep up her act.

Just like how succubi have some antipathy towards tranquility girls, it seems like tranquility girls have similar feelings about succubi.

It would seem that she is well aware that those men are customers of the succubi. Right, then, this plan will work.

"You really stepped in it by taking away the customers of the succubi. I wonder what they'll do if I bring them here? They'll probably be angry enough to turn you into a-"

"Eeeep! U-Um, handsome onii-san over there, if you know them, could you please get them to let me off?"

"Oh, I wonder~. Well, depending on what you're offering me, I might consider it."

"A-As long as it is within my power, I'll offer you anything!"

It feels like she'd do anything I ask of her right now.

First up is taking care of Sir's request.

"Well, in that case, about those fruits of yours, is there a way to make them last longer? They were completely rotten by the time I made it back to town."

"Ah, about that. With a few modifications, I can probably make them last about a week. How much do you need? I got a lot of nutrients recently, so I can probably make about 20 of them!"

“...Then give me about that much.”

“Right, no problem!”

With that, it started producing one fruit after another. It looked like it hurt a little the last time I was here, but this time it didn't show even a hint of pain. So that was an act too.

I tossed them all into the magic item called the cooler box that Sir gave to me.

“Now then, can you please persuade them to let me off?”

“Hmm? What are you saying?”

“Eh!? You promised me just now! You deceived me!”

“All I promised was to consider doing that. Besides, you deceived a lot of people too. Anyway, the guild's offering a reward for taking you out. It really is killing two birds with one stone.”

Drawing my sword, I strutted over to the dumbfounded tranquility girl.

“B-Brute! Pervert! Scum! I bet you've never been popular with the girls! Your pillow definitely smells strange! Ugly bastard! Your entire existence is an abnormality! I bet your neighbours are whispering that you're the one most likely to commit a crime!”

“Oh shut the fuck up!”

I brought my sword down upon the tranquility girl who finally revealed its true personality at last.

“Fweeh!? Ah? What was I... Ah, that girl!?”

Yunyun started making a fuss the moment she woke up, craning her neck in search of the tranquility girl even while there's still drool on her face.

“I took care of it.”

“Eeeeh! How could you!? Even if she's a monster, to actually kill her... Where did you leave your humanity! And here I was starting to think better of you! Give me back the

money I lent you!”

“You know... That thing is a monster that lives by luring people into dying at its feet and sucking the nutrients off their corpse. Beneath a tranquility girl lies a mountain of corpses. Don’t get taken in just because it looks like a human. Seriously.”

“But... But... Huh? Dust-san, there’s an empty wine bottle over there.”

“I helped myself to a little celebratory drink earlier. Anyway, there’s no reason to stay around here any longer, so let’s go.”

Pulling the still complaining Yunyun up, we started making our way back to where the succubi are.

“Huh? The ground here isn’t wet. And it doesn’t smell like the scent of alcohol is coming from you...”

After noticing the sound of the ground she stepped on has changed, Yunyun started sniffing at the air.

“You just woke up. Your nose probably isn’t working properly yet.”

I don’t know if all the adventurers beneath the tranquility girl died of their own will, but either way, it’s not wrong to present them with an offering of wine.

Chapter 2

An Exploration in that Capital!

Part 1

“Kazuma-san, now that we have some free time, let’s go for a drink! It’ll be your treat, of course!”

I opened the door of the mansion in search of Kazuma, but the only people present were Aqua, stuck halfway into the heating device known as the kotatsu, and the Explosion Girl who’s playing with her cat.

“Hey, it’s cold, so hurry up and close the door already, umm... Trash, was it?”

“It’s Dust! Hurry up and remember my name already! We just met not too long ago!”

Even after all the adventures and resurrections we went through, the Party Priest still has yet to remember my name.

Closing the door, I approached the kotatsu thing that I had been curious about for quite some time and stuck my legs inside.

“Oh... Oooh, wow, this is...”

The warmth spread up my legs in an instant. A mere moment inside is enough for me to consider spending the rest of my life wrapped in its embrace.

“Haah, so you fell into the grasp of the kotatsu, too. There’s not a single person who can resist this temptation...”

“Aah, no, this is impossible. I’m done for...”

After throwing my upper body under the kotatsu, I felt like just lazing around for the rest of my life.

“Hey, didn’t you come here to invite Kazuma out?”

“That kinda sounds familiar, but who cares about that?”

I can’t go against the allure of the kotatsu. I really want one of my own, but it’ll probably cost quite a fair sum.

Plus Lynn will most likely get mad at me if I lazed about any more.

“This kotatsu is my territory. Normally someone like you wouldn’t be allowed inside, but I might consider letting you stay if you tell me some interesting stories.”

“Doesn’t this belong to Kazuma?”

“Kazuma’s items are my items too! My companion’s possessions are everyone’s possessions, but my items are still mine!”

“Ahh, yeah, I get that!”

Aqua happily nodded as I voiced my agreement.

“Don’t just agree so easily. If you have nothing to do here, hurry up and go home. Kazuma has recently picked up gambling thanks to your influence, so don’t get too close to him.”

The Explosion Girl shot me an exasperated look.

If you ignore her explosion mania and Crimson Demon idiosyncrasies, she’d come off as a pretty decent person. Of course, those two factors are hard to ignore.

“Hey, don’t speak so badly of me. I did introduce him to the local gambling dens, but Kazuma is far more adept at those games than I am! In regards to such matters, he’s a genius!”

I don’t know if he’s a good learner or if he’s just great with his hands, but Kazuma’s results in gambling are just beyond compare.

His luck is great too, so things almost always end up falling in his favour. It makes me really envious.

“That’s precisely why I’m so worried...”

“What are you, his mother? If you interfere in every little thing a man does, he’ll end up detesting you, you know?”

“Gurk.”

Perhaps realizing that she has overstepped her bounds, the Explosion Girl fell silent.

Great, now I can really put my feet up and relax.

“So, hey, hurry up and tell me something interesting. I’m getting really bored over here.”

Don’t wave your feet under the kotatsu like that. What are you, a kid?

I always knew she was self-centered and unreasonable, but to think that Kazuma had to deal with such behavior every day...

I could ignore her, but I think she might actually throw me out.

“If you put me on the spot like that... Well, actually, it’s been on my mind as of late, but don’t you think that Eris worshippers tend to be on the smaller side? You know, chest-wise? The guys at the church, and that thief that Kazuma stole those panties from too, have ones so small that I question if they are even there at all. I was kinda wondering if there’s some kind of reason for it.”

“Well, isn’t that interesting!? Go on, go on!”

Seems like that caught her interest.

The feud between the Eris Church and the Axis Cult is pretty famous, so it wasn’t completely unexpected, but still, isn’t she biting on a little too hard?

“I’ve met Goddess Eris once before, so I can state with confidence that those breasts of hers are stuffed. Natural breasts have a softness that’s visible even through clothes. There’s a sort of fluttering that screams at you to fill your palms with them.”

“That’s kind of disgusting, but nevermind. Continue.”

“I can’t feel any softness or warmth coming from those chests. She’s always depicted

as having a bountiful chest in the portraits and statues and such, but that's a lie. I'm sure the Eris worshippers must have picked up on it somehow. It doesn't matter if it's small, and it's acceptable to stuff your chest too. That's why those with small chests naturally flock towards her."

"I see, that's definitely how it is! In that case, if we start spreading the rumour that joining the Axis Cult will make your bust grow, we might be able to poach a few of them over! I'll encourage the others to spread this rumour at the next Axis Cult meeting!"

Aqua excitedly shook my hand.

I'm glad we had a meaningful discussion today.

"But the fervent Eris worshipper, Darkness, has large breasts, you know?"

And just as I thought we finally wrapped things up, the Explosion Girl interjected.

"There'll always be a few outliers. Even amongst the Crimson Demons, there are some with their heads screwed on straight, and some that have a pitiful chest and crazy thought processes."

The picture of a Crimson Demon who is bad at interacting with others and always has the aura of a loner came swimming to my mind.

"Oh, why don't you tell me exactly whose chest is pitiful and what part of her thought process is crazy?"

"Hey, wait, Megumin, don't use Explosion in the house! My precious wine will get completely destroyed!"

Seeing Megumin's eyes glow bright red and hearing her chant, I thought that it might be high time to get the heck out of dodge and scrambled out of the mansion.

After getting to a safe distance, I turned back and saw no trace of the telltale signs of explosion magic getting prepared.

So she picked up on that, huh? I would've liked to spend some more time enjoying the kotatsu, but, ah well. I'll just leave it for my next visit.

“What now~ Kazuma isn’t around, so there’s not much to do~”

I didn’t have much money on me, so all I could do was take a walk down main street to kill time. Just then, a woman with a body perfectly suited for my tastes popped into view.

I’ve been hanging out with women with all kinds of peculiarities recently, so I’d really like to have a meal or something with a normal girl for once.

“It’s been a while, but let’s go hit on her. Can’t really get up to anything else without money anyways. She looks to be the serious sort, so let’s go with this.”

I headed over so our paths would intersect...

She seemed to be quite preoccupied thinking about something, so she didn’t notice my approach at all.

I brushed up against her before exaggeratedly throwing myself to the floor.

“A-Are you alright?”

“Ouch!! I think I just broke a bone in my leg! What are you going to do about this!?”

“Eh? But we didn’t run into each other that hard...”

She seems a little flustered, but overall, she’s still unexpectedly calm.

I should turn it up a notch.

“I don’t think I can move like this. You should treat me to a meal or something in place of the doctor’s bill.”

“Eh? Is a meal really fine when you’ve got a fracture?”

She fell for it. In such a situation, when she’s still struggling with the guilt of possibly causing a serious injury, proposing something minor as recompense works surprisingly well as compared to making a huge fuss.

If things go well from here...

“That suspicious person over there! What are you doing!?”

A brat’s voice suddenly interrupted us. Turning around, I saw a young girl dressed in commoner’s garb pointing directly at me.

It would’ve been nice if it was just a brat with a strong sense of justice, but that doesn’t seem to be the case.

“This is how it’s supposed to go, right, Claire?”

“Yes, Alice-sama. That’s perfect.”

Beside the brat was a white-suited, short-haired woman clapping enthusiastically.

“Please, you two, stop drawing attention to ourselves!”

A third person came running up. She was dressed in plain robes that made her seem like a spellcaster.

All three of them have blonde hair and blue eyes. Are they nobles?

And I think I’ve heard that arrogant tone of the brat’s somewhere before. I can’t quite place my finger on it...

“Looks like I’ve got myself involved with a troublesome bunch...”

“You are the troublesome one! Committing unjust acts that disrupt the order of the world! As long as my eyes are black, I, the daughter of the Chirimen store, shall not let such acts slide! Ah, my eyes are blue, that’s just a figure of speech. Now, Claire, Rain, get him!”

“What’s a Chirimen store?”

“A Chirimen store is a Chirimen store!”

What kind of incomprehensible stuff is this girl saying?

And why is the white suit just drawing her sword without a second thought!?

“Wait a minute! I’m just getting some food... Eh, Sir!?”

Now that I look closely, the familiar masked and tuxedoed figure of Sir Vanir was standing right behind the three.

Why is Sir Vanir together with them?

I don't really get it, but I'll have to rely on him to pull me out of the fire now. It'd be really troublesome if I go up against a noble.

"This is just picking up girls! Sir, please explain to these people!"

"Hachibei, do you know this lawless person?"

"No, Moi does not know this person at all."

Sir, who was addressed by some weird name, denied without hesitation.

At that, the strangely familiar brat once again pointed her finger at me.

"I shall correct the unjust and make Onii-sama acknowledge me!"

"W-Wait, Sir, come on! Hey, damn it, you better remember this!"

Now that Sir is on their side, my current position is extremely dangerous.

I tried to dash away from the place as quickly as I could, but I let my guard down.

That Claire woman struck me in a right spot and sent me tumbling down. By the time I woke up, I was in a very familiar place.

That's right, the jail cells.

"And here I was just starting to feel off without you in the cells..."

"Were you lonely without me here?"

I struck up the usual conversation with the warden, and he responded by smacking the bars with his baton.

I'm not the kind of person to be intimidated so easily, so I simply ignored it and laid on the floor.

“Hey, is lunch ready yet? I haven’t eaten anything decent for the past few days, so give me something with a lot of ingredients! And don’t forget the dessert too!”

They didn’t respond, but I know that saying this will get me just a little bit more food.

Well, I didn’t have much to do right now, so I guess I should take a nap. They’ll release me tomorrow anyway.

<TL note: This takes place at the same time as the second chapter of the masked spinoff.>

Part 2

“Seriously, I’m really sorry about our idiot!”

“Haha, he’s a real handful, isn’t he?”

The police officer gave a wry smile to Lynn as she bowed repeatedly.

This is a very familiar scene to me.

“Thanks for taking care of me, I’ll be back soon.”

“Don’t come back again! This place isn’t a bed and breakfast!”

“You bow too!”

Lynn grabbed me by the head and roughly forced me down.

She’ll probably never vouch for me again if I were to resist here, so I obediently went along.

I followed Lynn who seemed to be in quite the foul mood as she walked out the door. I suppose I should try and cheer her up a little.

“Hey, you’ll put your pretty looks to waste if you scowl like that.”

“If you’re going to flatter me, at least choose your words better. *Sigh...* So, why did you end up in the cells this time?”

“Yeah, about that, a group of three blonde women interrupted me while I was hitting

on a girl. They knocked me out and handed me over to the cops. I didn't even do anything bad this time."

I laid it out exactly as it is, but Lynn simply gave me a distrustful look.

It doesn't seem like she believes a word of what I've said.

"I'm serious! Sir was there too, so you can go ask him if you think I'm lying!"

"Sir is referring to Vanir-san, right? I don't like him very much. I always get the feeling that he's seeing through me."

Lynn furrowed her eyebrows. It seems like she caught onto Vanir's powers somehow.

He does have that all-seeing sight of his, so she isn't entirely mistaken.

"Well, I need to catch up on what happened yesterday and pick up the rewards from the tranquility girl quest, so I'll head on over."

Normally, Lynn or Taylor would be in charge of handling the money, but in this case, that task falls to me.

They wouldn't mind if I took some of it for myself, would they? Actually, if I won a few games and made it grow several times, the others would be quite happy too.

Just as I was thinking of which den I should gamble today, I felt someone grab me on the shoulder.

"Not if you are picking up money. Trusting you or Keith with money would be like trusting an orc to watch over a guy. I'll be going with you."

"You really don't trust me, do you? Ah, well, I don't really mind."

I'll still need to get Sir to explain what happened yesterday anyways.

Even if she doesn't trust me, she should be satisfied with an explanation from Sir Vanir.

"Sir, I'm here to pick up the cash~!"

"Can't you put it in a more courteous way?"

The shopkeeper manning the store jumped up with a start the moment I opened the door to the magic item shop.

After confirming that it's me, Wiz breathed a sigh of relief.

"Oh, it's Dust-san. You gave me quite a shock. And you're with someone cute today."

"N-Nice to meet you. My name is Lynn."

Lynn politely introduced herself, a stark contrast to her usual demeanour.

Also, she's blushing slightly for some reason.

"Hey, what happened to your usual tyrannical personality?"

"That applies more to you! Do you not know her? Wiz-san is a powerful wizard who was known as the Ice Witch back during her adventuring days. She used to hunt down monsters without mercy, and there's even a rumour that she launched an attack on the Demon King's castle on her own!"

"Well, I knew that she used to be an adventurer..."

I only ever saw her getting berated by Sir, so I completely forgot about that.

Come to think of it, she was one of the two who blasted the Destroyer with Explosion magic, wasn't she?

"That was a long time ago. Do you need something? I thought you were a debt collector, so I couldn't help but put myself on guard."

"Isn't this store flourishing thanks to Sir Vanir's efforts?"

"Well, yes, we are making quite a bit of money thanks to the products that Kazuma-san thought up."

"Then there's no need to fear debt collectors this much, is there?"

In the first place, I don't get why you'd be afraid of debt collectors.

It's all a matter of planting your feet and intimidating them until they agree to extend

the deadline.

“It’s like a force of habit. I always had a lot of debts in the past. I can rest easier now that Vanir-san is lending me a hand.”

Seeing Wiz say that with a smile made my heart skip a beat.

She’s a beauty with a great body and gentle personality. In terms of chest size, Lynn’s can’t even hold a candle to her.

I can’t help but wonder why she’s still alone even with all of these qualities.



“...You look like a gormless idiot, you know?”

“Gah!? Don’t elbow me in the ribs!”

I jumped up in response to the sudden ribbing. This girl really doesn’t know how to hold back.

Just as I was considering grabbing her ass as recompense,

“What happened to the money that Moi worked so hard to earn, you garbage collecting shopkeeper!?”

The door connecting the store to the back room suddenly flew open, revealing Sir Vanir in a foul mood.

The storekeeper jumped up and fearfully averted her gaze.

“W-What do you mean?”

She’s really bad at acting casual. She must have purchased something useless yet again.

Anyone looking at her suspicious behaviour would’ve come to the same conclusion.

“I’m asking what happened to the money Moi earned. If you don’t answer me within ten seconds, Moi shall bury you together with all the garbage goods you bought over the years. You best prepare yourself.”

“Calm down. Vanir-san. I too won’t make the same mistakes over and over.”

Normally she would’ve admitted to buying something useless and get lectured by Sir, but she responded in a dignified manner today.

It seems like this unusual development was outside of Sir Vanir’s expectations too, for he simply stared wordlessly in response.

It’s the first time I’ve seen her so confident. Could she really have chanced upon something profitable for once?

“Then do share what you did with me. If it is something acceptable, Moi shall offer an apology.”

“Very well. I learnt this after observing you. The reason I always end up with unsellable goods is because I always make purchases on my own. Thus, if I were to consult with someone reliable before making a purchase, I wouldn’t end up making that mistake!”

She raised her fist to the air.

Well, that line of thought certainly isn’t wrong. Sir Vanir even nodded along in agreement.

“Ah, so you finally realized that. So, who did you choose as your partner?”

“My frequent customer, Aqua-sama-”

“Turn to ash!”

A mysterious light shone from Sir Vanir’s eyes and caused Wiz to char, crumple up, and start smoking.

I can understand his anger. It’s hard to imagine that extravagant Party Priest choosing anything decent.

Even Kazuma had a hard time keeping his fortune with her around.

“Have you already forgotten that time that self-proclaimed goddess talked you into buying up all that useless land!? How could you ever believe a word that comes out of that thing’s mouth!?”

Vanir screamed, but Wiz offered no response on account of her having lost consciousness.

Seemingly still in a rage, Sir Vanir grabbed a broom and started sweeping the ashen shopkeeper into a corner.

“S-Say, is Wiz-san okay?”

“This happens quite often. Don’t worry about it.”

“This happens... often?”

Lynn, still unused to this sight, timidly peeked out from behind me.

I get the feeling that this will just deepen her dislike for Sir.

“And that takes care of the trash. Now, Moi believes you are here for the reward? Here you go.”

I carefully grabbed the bag stuffed full with coins that Sir Vanir tossed to me.

He's trustworthy enough that I don't need to check the contents... no, knowing Sir, there might be a chance of him pulling some kind of prank on me. I'll check them later.

“I'll be able to clear my debts with this. By the way, how's the diet food thing going, Sir?”

“Moi has made a prototype product, but there's still a few side effects... Oh, what serendipity. Girl who's worried about her waistline, how would you like a free sample?”

“I'm not worried at all!”

Lynn angrily protested.

“Oh, so that's why you've been eating nothing but salads! If you want to lose weight, I can help you get some exercise on the bed at night.”

“Lightning! I'll blow you away!”

Lynn narrowly missed my face with a lightning bolt that sailed out through the open door.

“Gah, that was close! Say that before you shoot, not after!”

That was close. My face would've been in a right shape if that had connected.

Lynn was still glaring at me, her staff pointed squarely at my face. My life might really be in danger if I don't change the subject.

“A-Anyway, does that diet food really work? Not that I'm doubting you or anything, Sir Vanir.”

“It's no surprise even if you do doubt me. How about giving it a try? Moi does not mind

giving you a free sample on this occasion.”

“Well, I’m fine with taking some if it’s free, but didn’t you say something about side effects earlier?”

Sir Vanir crossed his arms and looked up towards the ceiling.

Don’t just fall silent. You’ll just make me more worried.

“Hmm, Moi doesn’t quite remember. Still, it simply lifts your mood and makes you crave more and more of it. There’s no need to worry. You won’t get fat no matter how much you eat, after all.”

“...Is that really okay?”

“If it really doesn’t make you grow fat...”

Lynn mumbled in a voice mixed with both disbelief and optimism.

Seems like she still has quite a bit of interest in the item despite her natural suspicions.

“Nah, I think I’ll pass on that. Do call me if you need a hand when it starts selling, Sir. I’ll see you around.”

I already got what I came here for, but Sir Vanir stopped me with a word before I could leave.

This was the same way he made a request of me the last time, right?

I have nothing but bad feelings about this. I already got the money, so I’d really like to get together with my friends and throw a party or something.

“There’s no need to be so on guard. It’s but a simple task. You simply need to carry this bag and hand it over to a black cloaked man with a scar on his face. You don’t even need to say anything. ”

“What, is that all?”

“Wait, that is suspicious as hell! There’s no other way to describe it! Aren’t you curious what’s in the bag? Simply possessing it might very well be a crime!”

Lynn grabbed me with trembling hands and started shaking me.

It's just a simple job, isn't it?

"Don't worry, it'll be an easy and very profitable job. Feel free to invite your friends too."

"That's like a standard line in a scam!"

"He's just having trouble carrying so many things by himself."

Rather than anything suspicious, it just sounds like he needs some help carrying goods.

After hearing the details, it seems like Wiz once bought a large quantity of high quality manatite. Of course, there's no way such high quality goods will sell in a town of beginners like Axel, and it has since been taking up space in the storeroom.

It's too difficult to sell off all of it, but at least a portion of it can be sold as a package deal along with some of the other pieces of trash that Wiz picked up over the years.

"Moi would really like to handle this in person, but who knows what this fool will get up to if no one watches over her. Worry not, Moi shall cover the costs of transporting it to the capital."

Saying that, he glared at the shopkeeper who's curled into a ball at the corner of the store.

"It's a little suspicious, but that does sound like a good deal. Plus, the fee for the teleport will be covered too."

"Ah, the capital. Nah, I'm fine. You guys can go on your own."

All my motivation disappeared the moment I heard about the destination.

I'd rather avoid any place where a lot of nobles gather. Me disliking nobles is a part of it, but it's best to avoid any risks where that matter is concerned.

"Ah, about that, there's no need to worry. Moi so declares, there's no chance of you reuniting with that person you're concerned about."

“What are you talking about? I haven’t the slightest idea.”

This is why Sir Vanir is so scary. Nothing can be kept secret from those all-seeing eyes of his.

Averting my gaze from Sir Vanir, my gaze instead met Lynn’s who was staring intently at me.

“What, did you fall for me?”

“Vanir-san, we’ll accept this job. You come with us too.”

“You’re free to accept, but I said I’ll pass.”

“If you don’t come with us, I’ll give all of this money over to your debtors.”

“At least leave me enough to buy a drink!”

Lynn wouldn’t budge no matter how much I protested, so in the end, I had no choice but to agree.

Part 3

It took a few days after that for the negotiations to be finalized, but we soon found ourselves headed over to the capital.

During that time, I’ve sighted that Alice girl or whatever around town. Somehow, she’s gotten quite close to the Explosion Girl and Yunyun, though I’m not quite sure what kind of relationship they have.

“Wow, so this is the capital. I’ve always wanted to see it! It’s as lively as I’ve heard!”

Lynn immediately jumped out the moment the light from the teleport faded, letting out an impressed sigh while gazing around. The very picture of a tourist.

“It’s my first time here too. It really is different from Axel.”

“There’re women dressed up in such stylish clothes all over the place. I can’t get enough!”

It seems like it's the first time Taylor and Keith are here too.

"The work comes first. Let's bring these over to the meeting point."

I jabbed my thumb behind me and cautioned my companions.

The goods are piled on a hand-drawn cart, and they have to be handed over to the other party by today.

Most of the items in the cart might as well be garbage, so they aren't paying a whole lot of money for it.

"Hey, what's wrong, Dust? Did you eat something bad?"

"Why are you acting so serious? Do you not feel well?"

"There really is something strange with you."

My companions gave me worried looks.

"Is it really that strange for me to take things seriously?"

"Yeah." x3

Damn you, you even all answered at the same time.

Even I have times where I treat my work seriously... Wait, was there? It should've happened once or twice, right? Yeah, there has to be.

"Anyway, let's get going. If you want to sightsee, save it for after the work is done."

"It feels really weird to be lectured by Dust, you know?"

"Yeah, yeah, I get you. It feels really irritating for some reason."

"It just makes you not want to do as he says, right?"

These guys sure love to shoot their mouths off.

Just bear with it for now. The sooner I hand the goods over, the sooner I can bid

farewell to this city.

“Did you find her!?”

“My apologies, she is not here either!”

Hearing the footsteps of a large group of people, I turned around to see a squad of knights and the white-suited woman named Claire standing right in their midst. And another person, Rain, was it? Well, she’s there too.

They were the ones who got in the way when I was hitting on that girl.

I hid behind the cart and waited for them to pass.

After watching Claire hastily walk away with the knights in tow, I let out a sigh of relief.

“For there to be this many knights running about... Did something major happen?”

“They did seem to be in quite a panic, but it doesn’t feel like we’re at risk.”

It piqued Lynn and Taylor’s interest, but to be honest, I couldn’t care less.

“It seems like they are looking for someone. They started splitting up into small groups.”

Keith was squinting in the direction they went. He’s probably observing them with Farsight.

“Who cares? Let’s just finish the job... Don’t just fall silent! I’m fine! Don’t look at me with such pitiful gazes!”

Lynn gently placed a hand on my forehead and suppressed a snuffle.

“I’m not sick!”

“Drink this anyway.”

Taylor placed a hand on my shoulder and gave me a hangover cure.

“And I’m not drunk either!”

Following that, Keith palmed a piece of paper into my hand as well.

I was just about to toss it away, but on closer inspection, that piece of paper turn out to be a coupon for the Succubus store.

I quietly pocketed it. Whatever the situation, that's the one thing I won't reject.

Part 4

With my companions being so concerned about me, they put their all into completing the job, and so the handover was completed in a snap.

They wanted to go sightseeing afterwards, but I just wanted to go back to the inn, so we ended up going our separate ways.

"I'd really like to explore the city too, but it'd just be trouble if I were to run into them again."

Claire and Rain are also wandering around the city in search of someone, and running into them will probably result in a headache. It really is safest to simply head to the inn and sleep.

Just as I was browsing around for some wine and snacks to savour when I get back to the inn, someone pulled on me from behind.

Turning around, I saw Lynn tugging on the sleeve of my shirt.

"Didn't you go sightseeing?"

"What about you? I knew the whole thing about you feeling unwell was a lie."

"I'm simply buying some wine so I can sleep soundly later."

"You know... *Sigh*. Oh fine. Just for today, I'll go shopping with you."

I have no idea what came over her for her to make that kind of offer.

Is she actually worried about me despite all of her complaints?

"Oh, well, thanks. Anyway, let's go pick up something delicious-looking..."

I followed my nose to a nearby stall, but it seems like they already have a customer.

“What kind of meat is this? I’ve never seen its like before...”

A blonde-haired kid was staring at sticks of skewered meat with extreme interest.

Oh, I definitely remember that voice. Why the hell do we have to run into each other at such a place?

“Ojou-chan, this is a high quality dish made from meat from a rare creature.”

“Ah, I see. If it is okay with you, could I have one?”

“But of course~ You’re really lucky, little lady. This one is the last stick. That’ll be a hundred thousand eris.”

“Oh, that’s quite a bargain.”

This man, is he planning to take advantage of a sheltered noble girl?

Even after hearing a price that’s so inflated that it isn’t even funny, she still moved to pay without the slightest bit of doubt.

“That’s just the meat from a giant frog, right?”

Lynn whispered into my ear.

Making money by fleecing tourists and the naive is the most basic of scams. I too participate in such from time to time, so I’m not really in a position to criticise.

I could just leave things as it is, but watching someone else other than me make easy money really pisses me off!

“Hey, old man, don’t overcharge for your goods. And you too, don’t be so easily tricked.”

I grabbed the hand the old man extended towards the money and glared at him, and he hastily pulled his hand back and let out a laugh.

“Ah, did I fall for yet another trick? I don’t know who you are, but thank you very much.”

As the kid raised her head after bowing, she thrust her finger at me in surprise as if she recognizes me.

“Ah, you’re the criminal from back then!?”

“Criminal...”

At the brat’s words, I could feel Lynn’s murderous stare upon me.

“I told you, that was a misunderstanding!”

“This goes for your criminal actions too, but I especially can’t forgive you betraying everyone’s expectations back when we were looking for members!”

“You were the ones who had the wrong impression in the first place!”

Her cheeks puffed up in anger, but I didn’t do anything wrong.

It was back when she was with the Explosion Girl and Yunyun and wanted to increase their number of playmates that we ended up butting heads.

“To think that I could’ve mistaken this guy for him... I must have really insulted the actual person.”

“Nevermind that, why don’t you properly apologize to me first!?”

In response, she tilted her head. I could just about see the question mark pop up over the brat’s head.

“Say, who is this girl?”

“She’s the one who made you pick me up from jail a few days back. That Alice or something that sicced her white-suited girl on me over a misunderstanding!”

“Oh, I see. I’m sorry about that. It seems like he’s caused you some trouble.”

“No, I should be the one saying that. My apologies.”

The two of them lowered their heads and apologized to each other.

Such a courteous tone is a complete reversal from the tone she took with me.

“Still, there’s something that I have to ask, who was the person you originally mistook him for?”

“That’s a certain person who’s quite famous amongst the nobility. He’s a noble from the neighboring kingdom and the youngest person to achieve the rare job of Dragon Knight. It’s said that he’s peerless with a spear, and on top of that, he’s handsome, just and could be said to be the very ideal of a knight.”

I casually started picking my nose as Alice eagerly relayed the story.

Lynn remained facing her, but her gaze slowly shifted towards me out of the corner of her eye.

“I have heard a similar story before.”

Yunyun wouldn’t shut up about it after our close call with that dragon, after all.

<TL: Dust 2, Chapter 2>

“So you know of it! Even though that knight had a wonderful life ahead of him, he threw away both his titles and lands to grant the wish of the princess who was betrothed to another, eloping with her together on his dragon...”

This brat sure loves to talk about him.

“So he kidnapped the princess. How large of a ransom did he demand?”

“He didn’t do that! It might have only been for a short period, but even though they know their love could never be realized, he still tried to grant the princess’s wish of a honeymoon lifestyle! There’s no doubt about that!”

I don’t know why she’s emphasizing that aspect so much, but there’s no doubt that story really struck a chord with her.

Also, Lynn has been staring at me out of the corner of her eye all this time. It’s not something I can easily ignore.

“If that’s true, that knight would be like the main character of a fairy tale.”

“Right!? He had the resolve to throw away everything for the sake of his love! There’s not a single girl who wouldn’t long for such a situation! Even I...”

The way Alice’s eyes glittered as she stared off into space is the very example of a maiden in love.

As for me, just hearing that story made my back itch.

“So, what happened to that handsome Dragon Knight?”

“He managed to keep his life after he brought the princess back, but his status as nobility was revoked. According to the rumours, he’s now an adventurer in Axel...”

“So that’s why you mistook the handsome and just me for him?”

“No, we thought it might be you because you’re the only man with blonde hair.”

She just had to lay it straight.

“But, I still have a few doubts... Your name was Trash-san, right?”

“It’s Dust! Why do you guys keep messing up my name!?”

“My apologies. Dust-san uses a sword, but that’s not the weapon you originally trained with, right? I’ve received instructions in martial arts since I was young, so I have some knowledge regarding such matters, and the way you carry yourself seems more fitting for someone who primarily fights with a spear.”

She looked me up and down with a scrutinizing gaze.

I do enjoy the attentions of women, but getting stared at is not something I enjoy.

And don’t say such unnecessary stuff in front of Lynn. I’m going to need someday to throw her off.

“A spear, huh... It must be because I make frequent use of the spear in my pants.”

“In your pants? You can hide a spear in such a place?”

“What are you saying in front of a child!?”

Alice tilted her head in confusion, while Lynn exploded at me.

Still, to think that she has no idea what goes on downstairs... She might be a kid, but what kind of walled garden was she raised in?

Darkness would've understood in an instant and gotten both excited and angry at the same time.

This girl might be the perfect example of what nobility should be, but her peers are just too eccentric.

"So, about that former Dragon Knight, can you tell me more details about him?"

"Sure, I'd be happy to, onee-san... Hmm? Say have we met somewhere before?"

"Eh? No, this should be the first time we met."

The two of them looked into each other's eyes.

If she finds Lynn's face familiar, that means... It'd probably be best to separate them before things get any more complicated.

"Anyway, who cares about that. I'd really like to go back to the inn already."

"Hold on a minute, I'm still talking to this girl. Or, would it be bad if I were to learn more about this Dragon Knight?"

"Not really..."

Lynn seemed really interested in this topic for some reason. Alice too seemed overjoyed with being able to talk more on this matter and happily continued.

"Then, let me start again from the beginning. It's a pretty famous story amongst the roya- nobility, the story of a low-ranking noble from the neighbouring country who is the youngest to attain the rare Dragon Knight job. That young man showed extreme talent as a Dragon Knight, and was loved by dragons even from a young age..."

I tried to subtly observe the two of them as Alice retold the story.

Perhaps because she's used to telling this story, she skillfully recited it without even

the slightest pause.

On the other side, Lynn was hanging on to her every word.

Just what exactly is so interesting about this story in the first place?

“Seems like he’s popular enough to create a fanclub. A stiff and proper knight... So he eloped with the princess who held an unrequited love for him?”

“Don’t you think it’s a wonderful story!?”

A Lynn who could barely keep her doubtfulness from showing on her face and an Alice whose eyes were sparkling.

Well, I’m sure this story must sound wonderful to a dream-filled kid.

“Hah, what an unlikable man. There aren’t any decent nobles in the first place. There’s that female knight who gets excited the moment she sights an enemy and charges in, and that perverted guy who had designs upon that knight. Oh, and there’s the guy that holds sexual feelings towards me.”

The last one is the worst. I originally thought he had a crush on Lynn, but the one he had a crush on was actually me.

That was really dangerous for me. I managed to escape, but just thinking back to that moment made my heart beat faster.

I still remember how Kazuma just left me on my own without even trying to offer me aid.

“There’s no way such nobles could exist! Stop slandering them!”

“But it’s all true...”

Lynn muttered under her breath.

“You really are a sheltered little lady, aren’t you? The real world is very different from whatever padded mansion you’ve been living in. It’s far larger and more chaotic than you can imagine, and what you might think is common sense won’t always apply.”

The outside world is far larger, and far more interesting.

It's not a world that a noble little lady kept so carefully insulated from all of it's darker aspects could understand.

"Y-Yeah, Onii-sama said something similar too. But that is precisely why I snuck out to explore the city! Ah!"

She hastily covered her mouth, but it's too late.

"The white-suited woman... Claire, was it? So the person she was searching for is you?"

"You're referring to the knights who're raising a fuss all over the city, right?"

"You know them!? Don't tell me you're here to bring me-"

A fearful expression fell over Alice's face.

Well, that removes any doubt I might've had. This girl really is the one they are looking for.

"We just happened to see them run down the streets. No, hold on a minute, if they're raising such a huge fuss over you, doesn't that mean that there'd be quite a sizeable reward for turning you over?"

A noble family capable of commanding such a large number of knights must be rolling in gold.

Judging from how desperate that Claire woman seemed, I could expect quite a sum as a reward.

"I've changed my mind. We're handing you over. Sorry, but I'm going to have you pay for my drinks."

"Leaving money aside, they seem quite worried about you. I think it'd be best if you headed back."

Lynn and I tried to convince Alice, but she only stubbornly shook her head.

"Could you please let me off? I only just escaped and haven't yet had the chance to explore the city much. If you let me off, I'll give you this ring I snuck out from the treasury to pawn for money."

“Ojou-sama, please give me your orders.”

I kneeled and took Alice’s hand.

Anyone would’ve done the same after seeing the size of the jewel atop the ring she’s offering me.

Don’t give me such a disdainful look, Lynn.

Part 5

“Are those two lovers? I’m a little envious.”

Following Alice’s gaze, a well-built man and a woman wearing thick makeup were talking about something while hand in hand with each other.

The man had a dreamy expression on his face as he was being led into a store by the woman.

“That’s just a man being led into a shady bar, Ojou-sama.”

“A shady bar?”

“First, she’ll make contact with a rich and interested-seeming man outside the bar. If they fall for it, she’ll use her body and wine to make them lose sight of their better judgement. In the end, they’ll end up fleecing him for everything he has on him.”

“He’s gone and fallen for this trick several times, so you can trust his word.”

You didn’t need to say that, Lynn.

I’m trying to stay on my guard for these sort of tricks, but my judgment is always the first to go whenever I get more than a few pints in me.

“So that’s how it is. I should warn Onii-sama so he can avoid falling for it.”

I don’t know what kind of person this Onii-sama that Alice is talking about is, but if someone is vulnerable to this sort of provocation, no amount of warnings will keep him from falling for it. A man’s sex drive is a terrifying thing.

“This entrance ticket is originally worth ten thousand eris, but for a short time only, you can have it for free! There’s only one exhibition being hosted right now, so feel free to observe for as long as you want!”

“Free entry to an art gallery? That’s a pretty good bargain, isn’t it? Why don’t we go have a look?”

I stopped Alice before she could approach the woman advertising by the side of the street.

“That’s a trap.”

“A trap?”

“There’s no way tickets to such a small exhibition would be worth ten thousand eris. Humans are naturally susceptible towards words like free or concepts like bargain. The moment you enter the gallery, they’ll start pushing expensive works of art upon you.”

“That’s pretty shrewd. It isn’t against the law, is it? If it is, I’ll have to relay this to father.”

“There’s no point. The customer willingly walked into the store by themselves and bought anything they did of their own will. Anyone who’s fooled has only themselves to blame.”

“B-but...”

She really is naive.

It’s not a bad thing to be pure, but she’ll probably get tricked by some bad guy like this.

“Wait here for a moment.”

It’s probably faster to show her in person.

That woman is quite used to this.

She seems to just be calling out to the crowd at random, but she’s actually searching for those who seem to cave easily under pressure.

I drew closer to that woman.

“Hey, nee-chan, is it true that you’ll give me an entrance ticket for free?”

“Yes, of course! It’s only... for a limited time.”

Her jovial smile vanished the moment she met my gaze. She probably sensed that I don’t make for good prey.

“Oh, that seems like a bargain. I’ll take one.”

“You don’t seem very interested in art, though.”

“You really shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. Though, yeah, I don’t care about art at all, haha! But, if it’s originally worth ten thousand eris, I should be able to get at least five thousand for it if I resell it, right?”

I deliberately said it in a voice loud enough to be heard over the crowd.

“Eh, wait , no, I can’t give it to you if you plan to resell it...”

She faltered and tried to distance herself from me, but I won’t let that happen. The kinds of people who engage in legally grey activities like such tend to conversely be vulnerable to pressure themselves.

After some cordial negotiations, I eventually managed to wring some teacakes and an envelope filled with money from her.

“Well, there you have it. You want some cake?”

When I returned triumphantly with the spoils of war, the other two instead slowly edged away from me.

“Why is she crying...?”

“You are really a villain, aren’t you?”

“I just asked her for a ticket and she gave these to me. I used to do this all the time back in Axel. The ones in the capital can’t even compare.”

If I did this back in Axel, the store owner would toss me out.

In the first place, such a ploy wouldn't work in Axel. The moment they heard the words free, the inhabitants of that town would swarm over and either negotiate the price down or not buy the paintings at all. In either case, the proprietor would end up making a huge loss.

The people of Axel are quite stubborn, after all.

"Still, you seem quite familiar with such activities. In such respects, you resemble Onii-sama just a little bit."

Is that Onii-sama of hers more familiar with how the world works?

Someone that resembles me, huh? He must be a pretty swell guy.

"I kind of feel sorry for your Onii-sama to be compared to Dust."

Oh shut up.

"By the way, are you really having fun with just walking around the city?"

"Yes, very much so. Taking a walk around the city like a normal girl is pretty fun."

Seeing her carefree smile couldn't help but give pause to both Lynn and I.

"O-Oh. Well, I'm glad for that."

"That blush really doesn't suit you, you know?"

Lynn punched me on the shoulder.

"Being free is nice. You can spend your life freely without worrying about anyone's gaze. I wonder if Onii-sama spends his days like this too?"

I think I have a good idea of what kind of person Alice is talking about.

That person simply causes trouble according to his own selfish whims, but he has a certain freedom that Alice really looks up to.

Perhaps Alice herself desires that too.

Seeing Lynn and Alice happily browse the roadside stalls brought certain memories to the forefront.

...This ain't good. This combination really isn't good for me.

"Ojou-sama, isn't it best to head back home? I'll escort you back as thanks for the ring."

The sun is almost halfway beneath the horizon and the surroundings are getting dark, so it's not a bad time to start heading back.

"I don't feel like going home yet. They've been increasing security recently to prevent me from escaping, so it's not often I get to enjoy such a situation."

"So you're a repeat offender."

"I have a boss that usually helps me escape, but it seems like she's been busy recently, so I had to handle things by myself. Onii-sama taught me a lot of useful tricks, so I've been able to manage quite well. Though Claire keeps saying that he's a bad influence and warning me not to spend any more time around him."

He might be her brother, but it doesn't seem like he's very welcome around the household.

Is her Onii-sama born of a different mother, I wonder? Perhaps her mother is of a higher status than the one who gave birth to her brother... Well, whatever the case, it has no bearing on me.

I'd really like to stop playing babysitter, but even though she's completely different in both looks and personality, she still can't help reminding me of her, so I can't help it.

And her face's been bothering me...

-Oh. I see. So Alice was a fake name after all.

"By the way, Tr-Dust-san."

"You almost just called me Trash, didn't you?"

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Dust-san, are you in hiding too? You have blonde hair as well...”

She’s changing the topic because she doesn’t want to go back yet.

“What about it? There are plenty of guys with blonde hair outside the nobility.”

“That’s true. I’ve heard that the Dragon Knight has blonde hair and blue eyes, but, wait, don’t tell me...”

I don’t know what went through her mind, but the moment she said that, she grabbed my head and moved her face right up next to mine.



“Hey, wai- what are you doing!?”

“Your eyes are red. It seems I was mistaken after all. My apologies, Dust-san.”

“It’s fine, just get off me.”

Iris gave me a deep bow after letting go of me.

Well, changing the topic is fine an all, but it’s gotten quite dark out by now.

“Seriously, if you don’t head back soon, it’s going to become a major-”

“There she is! Arrest that man besides her! You may cut him down if he resists!”

Announcing her presence with a scream was the white suited-woman, a sword in hand as she charged at us. Following hot on her heels is a small band of knights.

From the looks of things, it doesn’t seem like she has any intention of listening to anything I say.

“Oh shit! Seeya, ojou-sama! Make sure you properly clear up this misunderstanding!”

“Ah, thank you very much for being with me today, Dust-san and... your girlfriend.”

“I am not his girlfriend!”

I really don’t want to find out what happens if I were to be caught here, so I quickly grabbed Lynn’s hand and ran away.

Don’t think you can so easily catch up with me who spends every day running away!

It’s been a few days since I returned from the capital.

I tried to sell the ring that Alice gave me, but the damned thing had the crest of the royal family on it. Not a single pawn shop would even give me the time of day when I tried.

So that kid really was the first princess of the Kingdom, Iris.

“This is completely worthless.”

It's not like I could brag about the incident either. It's just too risky, so there's really nothing I can do with it.

I considered the possibility of exchanging it for gold the next time we meet, but I don't intend on ever visiting the capital again, so chances of us running into each other are pretty slim.

"Aaahh... I'm so free."

I let out a large yawn and got off the bed.

The money I got from Sir is pretty much all used up now, so I suppose I should start looking into getting another quest.

I poked my head into the guild, and standing right in the middle is a short-haired woman wearing an out-of-place suit who was observing her surroundings with bloodshot eyes.

I immediately turned around and tried to leave the guild without drawing attention to myself.

"Ah, that's the Dust-san you're looking for."

I heard Luna's voice saying my name, followed by the footsteps of two people hastily rushing towards me.

...Ah, I really want to run away.

Chapter 3

An Adventure for those Bodyguards!

Part 1

“Are you listening, Trash!?”

In a drunken stupor, the white-suited woman shouted at me.

“She’s calling you, Trash-san.”

“Shut up unless you want me to smash those small boobs of yours.”

Taking advantage of Claire’s outburst, Lynn started calling me strange names as well.

Actually, why the hell is Lynn here too?

“Claire-sama, please lower your voice! You’re attracting a lot of attention!”

Sitting next to her was a plain-looking girl dressed in a magician’s robe.

The two of them wanted to discuss things over a drink, but then Claire started spilling her worries, and now this is happening.

Lynn joined us before I realized it, and now the four of us are seated around the table.

“She used to be so precious that she could very easily pass for an angel or a fairy... Well, even now, she’s still very cute!”

She’s been gushing about Alice ever since we started, so I haven’t actually learnt what exactly they’re here for.

“Ever since she met that man, she has started picking up bad habits. She has become more wilful and acting like more of a tomboy, using strange turns of phrases and sneaking away behind our backs... Well, that kind of innocence is cute too. However, what I absolutely cannot accept is her calling that man onii-sama!”

“She’s getting more and more inventive with her escape methods too.”

The two of them heaved a big sigh.

From the sounds of things, this onii-sama isn’t related to Alice by blood, and is probably the nickname that she gave to someone she idolizes.

A person whom the crown princess refers to as Onii-sama, huh? Yeah, of course Claire would be vexed.

“Sure, I was somewhat cold to her back when we first met, but that was only natural! I wanted to be in charge of Justice-sama’s education-”

“Aah, yes, Alice-sama’s onii-sama sure does bear a resemblance with Justice-sama, right!?”

The plain looking woman loudly said in an attempt to pave over the state secrets that Claire is leaking.

“Justice is the first prince of Belzerg, right? I’ve heard rumours that he’s really handsome guy and has been fighting on the front lines for quite some time.

“Tsk, strong, handsome, and a prince. Grah~ I can’t stand these types of people.”

“Now, now, don’t be jealous.”

Lynn patted me on the back as I grumbled.

I wonder if Lynn is weak to handsome guys too. Come to think of it, is she even interested in such matters?

Other than that one time I thought she was being pressured by that nobleman, I’ve never heard any such rumours about her.

“But I was taken in by that innocence and purity! By now, there’s no way I can live without her!”

It’s her business to say what she wants, but I really wish she wouldn’t scream such dangerous stuff in the guild. She’s starting to attract the attention of the nearby patrons, and I don’t fancy the kind of looks they are giving us.

“So, anyway, what business do you have with me?”

“The truth is, I had to give Ir-Alice-sama a just so very slight reprimand over a recent incident and warned her not to see that man again. Ever since that, she started sulking and wouldn’t listen to a word I say... No, I’m not doing this because I want to! It’s for your own goood!”

At that, she sunk her forehead against the table and started crying. Is she the sort of person who gets weepy when they drink?

“She hadn’t even drunk half her tankard. She must really be weak to alcohol.”

The plain looking girl next to her started patting her on the shoulder... Say, what was her name again?

“Um, the person who isn’t wearing the white suit-”

“It’s Rain... Indeed, I’m plain and unmemorable, aren’t I?”

She gazed towards her feet and mumbled.

“Er, sorry. But, seriously, why did you come all the way out here for?”

“The truth is, Alice-sama has always idolized adventurers. She always said that she wanted to go on an adventure, and her admiration for adventurers has only increased ever since she started associating with that person. So, we were thinking that if we understood what going on an adventure is like, we could give her a taste of the adventurer lifestyle and sooth her anger that way.”

“Yes, that’s exactly it! There’s no telling when the Demon King’s army might attack the capital, so it’s too dangerous to adventure there. Thus, we’ve come all the way out to this podunk town of newbie adventurers!”

Having Claire loudly insult the town of Axel drew cold stares from the surrounding adventurers.

Claire, being completely drunk, failed to notice any of it, but Rain immediately stood up and started repeatedly bowing to the nearby adventurers.

“You know, you don’t seem very much like a noble.”

“Yeah. Leaving Darkness aside, nobles generally carry themselves with more pomp and grandeur, like that Alderp fellow.”

Normally, nobles wouldn't lower their heads towards commoners so readily.

“Err, well, while I'm technically a noble, my house is a minor one without much lands or prestige. It can scarcely be compared to the likes of the Dustiness or Claire-sama's Symphonia house, so there's no need to stand on ceremony with me.”

It seems like Rain is of the more reasonable sort.

Though, Claire on the other hand seems more like the typical high-ranking noble with zero common sense.

“I'm not really that on board with this plan. Adventuring is fundamentally a dangerous task, and us deliberately exposing Alice-sama to danger is a little...”

Claire seems to be all for the idea, but Rain seems a little more hesitant.

“We wanted to ask that handsome Mitsurugi-dono at first, but no matter how hard we looked, all we found were sloppy and poor looking adventurers! It really troubled us!”

This girl just seems intent on drawing the ire of the other adventurers. It'd probably be best to shut this drunkard up before she makes things any worse.

“What's with that blonde woman!? Blonde hair means she's a noble... a noble...”

“Ah, a noble. I see. Well, there's not much we can do...”

“The former lord Alderp is the same way, and Lalatina has her own quirks too. The nobility sure are a collection of eccentric weirdos...”

The moment they realized that she's a noble, the anger of the surrounding adventurers melted away like a snowball in summer.

Thanks to Darkness's daily behavior and Alderp's scumminess, the amount of respect the title of nobility commands in this town is at an all time low.

“You know, you really seem fated to get involved with the nobility lately.”

“Yeah, and it’s all good for nothing!”

I’ve never had much good memories with the nobility, but it’s been a parade of weirdos ever since I came to Axel.

The two nobles in front of me are relatively normal by those standards, but I still want as little to do with the nobility as possible.

“Oh, Claire-sama, please keep quiet! I’m really sorry about this!”

At Rain’s apologies, the other adventurers waved their hands in a ‘don’t mind it’ manner.

It would seem like this girl acts as a sort of diplomatic liaison for the pair. Well, with her plain appearance and clothes, she certainly does seem more approachable.

“Err, in any case, with Mitsurugi-dono unavailable, there is only one other adventurer we know of in this town.”

“And who is that?”

“We had quite a bit of, umm, interactions with him in the past. But he is a little problematic, and there’s no way we can let him get close to Alice-sama.”

Huh, they seem to be beating around the bush.

Did they have some sort of dispute with that adventurer?

“We’ve heard rumours that there is a Crimson Demon girl that Alice-sama has gotten close to in this town, but she seemed really uneasy when we approached her...”

I think I know exactly who they are talking about.

“So that’s why she has been staring at us all this while.”

Following Lynn’s line of sight led me to Yunyun, who has been surreptitiously glancing at us ever since we entered the guild.

I waved her over.

“Why did you drag me into this?”

“That’s not it! I originally suggested Megumin and Kazuma-san, but they immediately prostrated and begged me to spare them. The only other adventurer I know is Dust-san...”

So she dragged me into this because of her loner personality.

Still, why do they hate Kazuma’s party so much?

I recall Kazuma telling me that he went to the capital and made friends with a princess back when we got absolutely hammered, but... No, that can’t be. Even he couldn’t be that lucky.

Still, regardless of the situation, I really don’t want to get involved with nobility.

“Sorry, but I don’t think I’ll be a good fit in a party with a pair of nobles. I know nothing about courtesy and proper forms of address and such, and that’d cause some problems, wouldn’t it?”

“You need not worry on that front. There’s no need to concern yourself with such matters during an adventure. Just treat us like you would your companions.”

“You might be fine with that, but I don’t think she’ll accept it.”

Rain will probably forgive any improper behaviour with a laugh, but the one who’s currently sprawled on the table will definitely raise a fuss.

“It’ll probably be fine. If it’s for Alice-sama’s sake, Claire-sama will endure anything. Plus, she has spent a lot of time dealing with that person as of late, so she’ll be able to tolerate some selfishness and rudeness.”

Hearing her state such with so much confidence just makes me more curious as to who that mysterious person actually is.

A selfish and rude person who teaches Alice bad habits and strange phrases, and is close enough to her that she’d address him as Onii-sama...

No, nothing’s coming to mind.

“What kind of benefit would I get out of this?”

“We would prepare a suitable compensation. Will that do?”

Money, huh? Well, these two probably don't lack for gold, so I can expect quite a sum from them.

“I know that you dislike the nobility, but that'd clear your debts, so why don't we give it a shot?”

“Dust-san, you probably have no money and lots of free time, right? Then just accept it. Don't you feel sorry for them?”

Lynn and Yunyun seem all for it. What should I do...

This Alice must be a really important to Yunyun if she's willing to go this far for her.

...Well, I do owe quite a bit to Yunyun. I might get some divine punishment if I don't return the favour from time to time.

Plus, without Alice here, things shouldn't become too troublesome.

“Oh, fine. I needed the money anyways.”

Part 2

The next day, Yunyun was the first to appear in front of the guild

“Eh, why is Dust-san here before the meeting time!? Did I arrive early by half a day?”

“Is there a problem with me being here early?”

“Is something wrong? Do you feel sick or something?”

This girl is seriously worried about me.

I might be late often, but this is still way too much of an overreaction.

“I just drank my fill thanks to those noble ladies last night and found myself here when I woke up, that's all. More importantly, why are you here so early in the morning?”

“It’s rude to keep others waiting. Unlike you, I always make sure to arrive an hour before!”

She says that, but she was probably just looking forward to adventuring in such a large group so much that she couldn’t sleep.

“You know, I mentioned this before, but aren’t you packing way too much luggage with you? We’ll be back in town by nightfall, you know?”

“There’s no telling what will happen on the journey. I brought a change of clothes and a portable cooking set and- oh, yeah, Wiz-san gave me one of her unsold magic items. There were originally two of them, but one of them broke and the other one wouldn’t sell. Err, where did I leave it...”

She placed the large rucksack on the ground and started rummaging through it, pulling out item after item from its depths.

Seriously, how much did you bring with you?

“I don’t really care, so you don’t need to show it to me. It’s about time for the meeting... Huh? Hey, what are you doing here?”

“I accepted this request as well. If I weren’t there, you’d probably cause some kind of incident with the nobles.”

Lynn said she wouldn’t be taking any jobs for a while, but she still showed up all the same.

“So Lynn-san is participating too! That’s a relief... I was worried because there wasn’t anyone who could deal with Dust-san.”

“If he does anything funny, don’t bother holding back, just blast him with magic.”

“Stop saying strange things! She’s a Crimson Demon! The power of her spells ain’t nothing to laugh about!”

The two of them ignored me.

Yunyun seemed quite elated to have a companion that she’s familiar with and happily welcomed Lynn.

It's probably worthless to continue this line of discussion, so I simply left them be.

"Sigh, you guys really don't trust me. Anyway, those two... Ah, there they are."

The two nobles arrived together.

"I'll be in your care today."

"Please take care of me."

Claire stood proudly without even lowering her head, but Rain gave us a proper, polite bow.

Rain came fully equipped with a staff and a full set of magic rings. Between that and her robes, she does look the part of a proper adventurer.

Claire, on the other hand, arrived wearing only her white suit and her sword.

Does she plan to take up the position of vanguard while dressed like that?

"We'll be in your care too!"

"I'll be joining you as well, so please take care of me."

"Yeah, yeah, good morning."

Yunyun bowed numerous times like she always does.

Perhaps because she's dealing with nobles, Lynn too put on a polite front. To be honest, it just gives me the creeps.

I just gave them a casual greeting.

A flash of annoyance graced Claire's features, but at Rain's gentle nudge, she simply let out a "hmph" and turned away.

"Dust-san, you're dealing with nobles here! Please be mindful of yourself!"

"You're going to get executed if you get carried away, you know?"

“It’s fine. Right, Rain?”

“Yes, please treat us as you would each other. We’re here today to learn how to act like adventurers, Claire-sama.”

“Indeed, I can endure this for the sake of Alice-sama. There’s no need for any special treatment.”

That’s not at all convincing when you’re staring at me like that.

Still, I can understand how much she loves Alice after seeing how she acted last night.

“By the way, Dust-san, what is the plan for today?”

“You just want to act like adventurers, right? I was thinking of hunting a few goblins and maybe a giant frog or two. That’s standard fare for adventurers around here. You have no objections, right?”

Incidentally, I already accepted a goblin extermination quest from the guild. I’ll be able to get rewarded by the guild while playing babysitter for these two, so it’ll be a very profitable day.

The meat of a giant frog can be sold for quite a fair sum. That’d cover the costs of drinks tonight.

“Goblins and giant frogs, huh? They sound like small fry to me, but I suppose they’ll do.”

“Those are standard fare for adventurers. I’m sure Alice-sama would be interested and start listening to us again.”

“I-Is that so? Then let’s put our backs into it!”

It’s obvious how high Claire’s spirits have risen with just those few words.

I see, using Alice’s name is a good way to get Claire to do what you want. It seems like Rain has truly mastered how to manipulate her.

“Right, let’s go. Don’t fall behind now.”

I led the way, Lynn and Yunyun followed behind me, and the other two took up the rear.

Yunyun repeatedly shot curious glances behind her, but, as can be expected, she couldn't muster up the courage to raise her voice, so the entire party advanced in silence.

Having a party of five people travel in silence bestowed a really heavy atmosphere around us.

Right, guess I'll have to break the ice.

"Just to be sure, the two of you can handle yourselves, right?"

"I'm quite confident in my skill at magic. There won't be any problems."

"Of course. Protecting Alice-sama is my job! A few goblins aren't even worth mentioning!"

"Don't just swing your sword around, you idiot!"

I shouted as she drew her sword and started demonstrating a few strikes with it, and she shot back with a glare. I feel like I'll get stabbed in the back if I piss her off too much.

On the other hand, Rain seems quite reliable.

Claire and I are the vanguard, and the rearguard consists of the mages Rain, Yunyun, and Lynn. As far as party balance goes, this isn't too bad.

There are certain problems with Claire's personality, but judging from how she was swinging her sword earlier, her sword arm is pretty reliable.

Well, they are the bodyguards of the princess, after all. I suppose it's to be expected that they'd be somewhat skilled.

In addition, nobles would be able to afford foodstuffs that contain a lot of experience points like onion ducks, so their levels should be fairly high.

It doesn't seem like they have much actual combat experience, but they shouldn't be done in too easily.

“Let’s go hunt the giant frogs first. With how it is around these parts, they can’t hibernate and are active pretty much year round.”

“Hold on a minute, what do you mean by they can’t hibernate?”

“Isn’t that obvious? Every single day... Actually, it’s about time, isn’t it?”

“Ah, it’s the usual time for Explosion, right, Yunyun?”

“Yeah. I heard that she is going with Aqua today, so she’ll probably let it loose somewhere close to the city.”

Yunyun answered while keeping an eye on her surroundings.

As her childhood friend, she has been dragged along with the Explosion Girl whenever she’s free, and it seems like that experience has given her a firm grasp of exactly when that girl gets the urge to let loose.

“No, really, what-”

Claire’s question was cut off by a loud boom that originated from the plains a short distance up the road from us.

Even though we were quite some distance away, the shockwave was still strong enough to buffet us.

“W-W-W-W-W-W-What is going on!?”

“What was that!?”

Ignoring the two of them who had assumed a combat stance, the three of us gazed out at the rising fireball in the distance.

It really isn’t something to get so worked up over.

“That’s quite a sight. It’s been a while since I was this close, but hasn’t it become bigger than before?”

“You can really feel the power of that blast when you’re this close.”

“It seems like she wasted her points on raising its power again. And today seems to be a pretty good day for her too. I really wish she’d learn some other spells...”

It seems like Yunyun has learnt how to judge the Explosion Girl’s condition just by the sound of the Explosion.

Come to think of it, I’ve heard Kazuma say that he’ll give it a rating based off its firepower and provide feedback, right?

“No, wait, why are the three of you so calm!? That explosion happened not too far away from town! It could be an act of terrorism or an attack by the Demon King’s army! Please raise your guard!”

“We need to return to town and inform Lalatina-sama!”

“Calm down, that’s just Explosion magic. It’s an everyday occurrence here in Axel.”

Seeing those two work themselves into a panic, I let out a sigh.

There’s no need to raise such a fuss over a small matter like this.

“Why are you so calm!? And Explosion is a joke spell that uses so much mana that you wouldn’t be able to do anything else after firing a single shot! The only people who would bother to learn that spell are experienced mages with points to spare! There’s no way such a mage would just let loose with it every day for no reason!”

Rain shouted in a panic, and Yunyun repeatedly nodded to her words.

“Yes, but there are two mages in Axel who can use Explosion magic. The poor one and the crazy one.”

“Eh? Even though this is a town of beginners?”

Rain’s jaw dropped open. Claire didn’t react quite so badly, but she still seems taken aback nonetheless.

“You know, you guys won’t make it very far as adventurers if you get surprised by every single little thing. It’ll be tough going on if you don’t sort out your expectations.”

I placed a hand on her shoulder and gave her a gentle smile.

“Why are you treating me like I’m the strange one!? The residents of this town are really strange! Vanir-sama treated us like we lacked common sense before too, but it’s definitely the residents of this town that are strange!”

“Indeed! Not even the authority of nobility holds any weight here! There must really be something wrong with this town! ”

It seems like they have experienced similar incidents when they were here before.

Yunyun and Lynn gave me a wry smile.

“Okay, okay, fine, we won’t talk about such matters anymore. You wanted to do something adventurer-like, right? Here they come, now’s your chance.”

I thrust my thumb behind me towards the emerging bodies of the giant frogs popping up from the ground.

Such monsters don’t do well in the cold, so normally they wouldn’t be showing up around this season, but thanks to a certain crazy girl recklessly throwing around magic every day, the frogs around Axel couldn’t hibernate and are active even now.

“So that’s a giant frog. It’s the first time I’ve seen one, but I’ve heard that they are easy prey for knights and warriors. I’ll handle this, don’t interfere.”

Saying that, Claire drew her sword and stepped out in front of us.

Rain is clutching her staff, but it seems like she intends on leaving things to Claire. Well, if she can really handle it on her own, it’d save me a lot of trouble too.

“I wonder if Claire-san has fought a monster before?”

“Umm, is it really fine for us not to help?”

“It’s fine. She’s the one who wants to do it, so let’s leave it in her hands.”

My two companions seem worried, but it’s really not a big deal.

I’ll step in if it looks like she is really in danger.

“Hmph, lowly monsters like them won’t lay even a finger on me!”

Claire confidently declared.

It's true that with Claire's skills, she shouldn't have any problems dealing with a single giant frog.

A single giant frog, that is.

Five more giant frogs came running towards us from the direction of the explosion.

"Hey, are you sure you don't want me to lend a hand?"

"There's no need. Rain too, just stand there and watch. Giant frogs might devour livestock and humans, but they won't eat knights or warriors!"

Her information isn't exactly wrong, but it isn't exactly right either.

The horde of giant frogs rapidly approached Claire, and one of them shot its snake-like tongue towards her.

Claire stood confidently in its way... And was promptly wrapped up in its tongue and dragged headfirst into the frog's mouth.

"Bogwah-!"

Claire's frantically flailed her legs around, the only part of her that's sticking outside the frog.

"Yeah, I knew this would happen."

The reason why giant frogs don't eat warriors and knights is because they hate the smell of metal. They wouldn't have any issues with eating someone wearing nothing but a suit.

"Claire-Sama! I'll save you with magic- ah, no, I can't get a clear shot-ah!"

Rain too was snatched up in a glup the moment she hesitated.

The two of them were taken down almost instantly.

"I-It's slimy in here! Don't just stand there, help me!"

“Ugh, no, this feels disgusting! Ah, don’t lick there-!”

They’ve managed to extract their upper bodies from the giant frogs, but there’s not a lot they can do after they’ve been grabbed like that.

“They won’t be digested right away, but we should still help them.”

“Hang in there, I’ll cut you free right now! Light of Sa-”

“Hold it. Give them a few minutes.”



I stopped Yunyun before she was able to let loose with her magic.

It seems like she was taken aback by the serious tone that I used, and stared at me in surprise.

They were still being slowly swallowed while we waited, but their slime-covered bodies were jiggling as they struggled, and they were constantly saying stuff like “C-Cut it out!” and “Ah, no, not there!”

“Their clothes are getting more and more transparent by the second!”

Between the slime and their desperate struggles, their clothes were getting more and more messed up, revealing skin and even precious flashes of their underwear.

“Are you an idiot!? Light of Saber!”

A blade of light emerged from Yunyun’s hand and flashed across the giant frogs.

Ah, and it was such an erotic situation too. What a waste.

The two of them flopped onto the ground after getting rescued, their bodies shiny with slime and saliva.

“How could I have let my guard down!?”

“This feels disgusting!”

“You guys really smell, so keep your distance.”

I pinched my nose and made shooing motions with my hand.

Claire’s face scrunched up in anger, but Rain seemed to notice the kind of state her body is in and blushing covered herself up.

“Dust-san, I really don’t think they should be left like that. Can’t we take a detour to a place with some water? We have to wash away the slime... And the smell is really strong too.”

“I’m sorry, but I’ll have to request we do that too.”

“Please.”

However exciting this sight might be, I too don’t want to endure this smell for another moment longer if I can help it.

“We aren’t too far from that lake, so let’s swing by there.”

Lynn’s voice is unexpectedly gentle. I guess she feels a sense of kinship toward them too.

Oh well. The lake where we fought against that tranquillity girl is pretty close, so let’s head over.

“Okay, let’s head over to the lake. You’re fine with that, right?”

Claire and Rain followed us without complaint. It seems like the slime really does feel disgusting.

It is a little bit of a bother, but a bath by the lake... well, I suppose that isn’t too bad.

“Dust-san, did you imagine something strange just now?”

“I can pretty much guess what it is.”

“There’s nothing but gentlemanly thoughts going on up here.”

In order to avoid giving away my expression, I took up a position at the front of the party.

Part 3

I sat by the shores of the lake, my back against a large rock that blocked my sight of the lake itself.

Well, perhaps seated is the wrong word. It’s more accurate to say that I’m tied behind the rock. With rope.

The moment we reached the lake, Lynn and Yunyun surrounded me and bound me up without brooking a single argument from me.

“Hey, come on, untie me already! Don’t you have any trust in me!?”

“Just exactly what part of Dust-san is worthy of any sort of trust? A person who’d charge into a horde of wild beasts naked is more trustworthy than you.”

“Well said. That’s exactly it.”

No matter how much I asked or begged, all I got back in return was refusal and cold gazes.

Yunyun and Lynn were supposed to be in charge of standing guard, but they paid no attention to any surrounding monsters that might be present and focused all their attention on me.

I’ll completely miss my chance to take in some beautiful sights like this.

Falling silent to think of a way out of this predicament, the only noises I could hear were the two nobles chatting away in the distance.

“I finally got rid of the stickiness. Guh, it went all the way to my panties...”

“I need to dry my clothes...”

What kind of torture is this? The nude forms of two women are just a turn of the head away, but yet I can’t see them.

Two beautiful girls are taking a bath. It’d be an insult not to take a peek.

“Lynn, you know I’m not that sort of person, right? We’ve been through a lot together, right? All those obstacles we overcame-”

“I still haven’t forgotten how you tried to lay a hand on me.”

She flashed the dagger on her waist with a dark smile.

How long ago was that?

And that dagger she’s playing around with is that very same one she threatened to cut off something precious of mine back when I tried to play a prank on her, right?

She's the sort of person who'd actually go through with it.

Thankfully, there aren't any issues with keeping my urges in control nowadays thanks to the succubus shop... I should treat Loli Succubus better when I return to town.

Anyway, it doesn't seem like I would have any luck convincing Lynn right now. That only leaves the easy one.

I dexterously stood up while still bound and tried to casually lean against the rock.

"Say, Yunyun, we're friends, right?"

"We aren't friends, just acquaintances. And trying to strike a cool pose while wrapped up like that just makes you look weird."

"Don't be so cold. Aren't we close enough to see each other naked?"

"T-T-That's... Don't make me remember weird things! There's been a strange rumour floating around that I'm on good terms with a blond delinquent lately! The people at the guild even give me pitiful gazes whenever I show up! What are you going to do about this!?"

She frantically waved her arms and advanced towards me. I tried to take a step back, but due to the ropes, I lost my balance and ended up on the floor.

"Gwah... It hurts!"

I could feel a large bump growing around my forehead. I must have smacked my head on a rock or something.

"Aah, sorry! Are you okay, Dust-san!?"

Normally, I would've been losing my temper right about now, but I need to be gracious in this situation.

"It's fine, don't worry about it. But, seriously, could you untie me? Something really bad is going to happen if you don't."

Yunyun recoiled slightly in fear.

“Y-You won’t scare me with such threats! What can you possibly do all bound up like that?”

“Oh, you’ve said it now... What can I do? If you leave me tied up like this, I’ll piss myself for you.”

“Eh!?”

“And it’s not just piss, I’ve drunk quite a bit of wine too, so my stomach isn’t feeling too good. If the dam breaks, it’ll cause quite the mess... you know?”

In response to my confident declaration, Yunyun nervously glanced away.

When I rolled a little closer to her, Yunyun fearfully moved away.

Ah, this is quite amusing.

As I sneaked ever closer to her, she repeatedly tripped over herself in her attempts to distance herself from me.

There aren’t any actual problems with my stomach, but those are some truly amusing reactions. Maybe I should tease her a little more.

“If you leave me like this, I’ll cling onto you after I’ve soiled myself!”

“Stop, you pervert! Don’t get any closer!”

Lynn simply looked on at our antics with an exasperated look as I crawled after Yunyun like a worm.

“Kyaaa!”

Suddenly, Rain’s screams cut through the air.

I turned around, but of course, the large rock blocked my view of what’s going on.

“What happened!?”

“Eh? Eh? What’s going on!?”

Lynn and Yunyun left me behind and rushed over to the lake.

“Hey, come on, don’t leave me like this!”

I tried standing up, but I just couldn’t keep my balance while bound up like this, so what followed was a series of bumps and scrapes as I slowly shifted my way around the rock.

My vision was somewhat blurry by the time I made it to the lake, but I could make out the two nobles engaged in combat with several goblins.

And the sight that greeted me made it impossible for me to tear my gaze away.

Sadly, they had their pants on, but there was nothing covering their upper bodies. They were trying to fend off the goblins while using one arm to cover their chests.

Claire had her sword, but Rain had neither her staff nor her rings with her, so she had no way of attacking.

Being waist deep in water and having to fight while keeping their chests covered obviously made moving around hard for them.

“Damn, how could mere goblins make a fool out of me!?”

The goblins seemed well aware that they couldn’t demonstrate their full strength in such a condition, and they taunted them while staying slightly out of their reach.

Claire had a lot of trouble landing her attacks in this situation. Her vigorous movements while chasing the goblins made it seem like certain parts might slip out at any time.

Dammit, the reeds are in the way!

On top of that, Lynn deliberately rushed into my line of sight.

“Hey, position yourselves better! Right, you, move a little further to your left and get that right arm out of the way! And someone cut these reeds! You too, Lynn, you’re in the way! Move!”

I unwittingly started cheering on the goblins, and a few sets of murderous gazes were

shot my way.

“Hey, doesn’t it sound like that guy is actually cheering on the goblins rather than us!?”

“I had a bad feeling when I heard that he was a friend of Kazuma-sama, but I didn’t think he’d be...!”

“I already knew this, but you really are the worst! Hang in there, I’ll help you right away!”

Perhaps sensing Yunyun’s magic power, the goblins facing us immediately started running away.

Lynn hastily scrambled out of the way, leaving only me surrounded by goblins.

Yunyun’s hand glowed with magical energy.

“Hey, wait, hold on a minute! You’ll get me with that spell too! Hey, come on, um, Yunyun-sama. Come on, are you listening to me!? I’m not like Darkness! I don’t have that sort of tastes!”

Ah, she’s acting like she can’t hear me.

She can’t be still holding a grudge over how I teased her earlier, can she?

“Lightning Strike!”

At those words, a barrage of thunderbolts swallowed up both me and the goblins.

Part 4

“It seemed like you’ve awoken.”

“You’re alive. How wonderful...”

I’m still tied up, but my life hasn’t ended just yet.

The two nobles seemed to have wrapped up their bath while I was out, and looked down at me with wet hair.

Their clothes were dry too. Rain probably used some kind of spell to do that.

Dammit, I can't believe I slept through such a beautiful sight.

Still, I'm surprised I managed to take such an advanced spell without any damage... well, I'm not unharmed exactly, but it's certainly less damage than I expected.

"Would it not be best to simply leave this man here?"

"I support that notion."

"I can't see him as anything but a detriment!"

Why are Lynn and Yunyun so on board with this!?

I wanted to say that up front, but I swallowed those words the moment I met their contemptful gazes.

"Now, now, hold on a minute. You'll lose out on quite a bit if you abandon me here."

"Oh? Then why don't you tell me exactly in what way will leaving you here be a loss for us?"

Claire crossed her arms and glared down at me.

"First of all, the one who accepted the quests was me. Without me to handle the paperwork, it will be difficult for you to get any money for the work you've done today."

"I don't care for such dirty money."

"I kinda do want it..."

Claire, being from a family on the same level as the Dustiness house, doesn't seem to want for money.

But Rain is a different matter. She's from a impoverished noble family, so prospects of fame and fortune are particularly tempting for her. I'm certain of that after the time we spent in the bar last night.

"You might even be able to end up with some treasure."

“Treasure!? Tell me more about that!”

Rain’s tune changed completely. It seems like even the nobility aren’t free from the concerns of money.

“It’s worth... well, probably not as much as you’re expecting. Still, if the knowledge that certain nobles are secretly working on behalf of the commoners were to spread, your reputation would increase by quite a bit. Darkness... Lalatina might have her own eccentricities, but she’s widely loved by the people of Axel because of her actions as an adventurer.”

“Umm, I’m a little interested in what you mean by Lalatina-sama’s eccentricities...”

Of all things, Rain just had to get interested in the most problematic bit.

“I’ll tell you all about it over a few mugs of beer. Anyway, secretly supporting the commoners from the shadows certainly seems like it’d strike Alice’s fancy.”

“Let’s untie him.”

Claire untied me in a flash.

She really will do anything if you bring up Alice’s name.

“Fuah~ I’m finally free. Anyway, we technically went giant frog and goblin hunting, so... what do you want to do now?”

Personally, I’d rather just head back to town, get paid, and start making merry.

“There’s no way we can go back just yet. We haven’t done anything great at all. Relaying what happened today to Iris-sama would just end with her laughing at us.”

“All we did was get eaten by the giant frogs and tormented by the goblins...”

True, these two didn’t really get a chance to shine.

Still, were there any other monsters lurking around here?

“Hmm, I really don’t think there are any other monsters within reach. It’d really be best to head back for the day.”

“But, I don’t know what Alice-sama will say if we shamelessly dragged ourselves back without going on a proper adventure...”

“It doesn’t have to be hunting monsters, isn’t there anything else adventurer like we could do? I don’t mind paying more money, so isn’t there something you can do? Even if it’s just an everyday task for you...”

It seems like they won’t want to go back without going on a proper adventure.

If they are offering to pay me more money, there’s no reason for me to refuse. Let’s see, something that’ll satisfy them...

“What I did yesterday... Well, I tried to sponge some food from the old man at the general store, but he said some petty things and drove me out when I tried to use some of the products as collateral for a loan. I didn’t have money, so I went to the guild and ordered some water. They threw me out after I stared a little too long at one of the barmaids’ butt. Then, I went to a nearby cafe to take in the sights, but they threw me out because I didn’t- ”

“Umm, isn’t there something more adventurer-like that you can talk about?”

But that is plenty adventurer-like.

In my time as an adventurer, I’ve done monster hunting and been a bodyguard. Oh, and I’ve also gone dungeon delving, haven’t I?

“The only thing that comes to mind is dungeon delving.”

“A dungeon!? That’d be great!”

“Alice-sama really loves those kinds of stories.”

Oh, that’s caught their interest alright.

The dungeons around these parts are...

The dungeon where we fought the mini-destroyer has completely collapsed. There were a lot of books in there, so it really is a waste, but there’s nothing I can do about that.

We could go to Keel's Dungeon. It's a beginner's dungeon, so it's relatively safe with the only monsters we'd run into being gremlins and the occasional undead.

Oh, wait, that dungeon was cordoned off after Sir Vanir did something there.

"Just any dungeon would do. Hey, Yunyun, do you know... Nah, nevermind. There's no way a loner would've gone dungeon delving."

"What exactly do you mean!? Sure, dungeons are dark and kinda scary and not a place I want to enter on my own..."

So what I said was completely accurate.

There are other dungeons in the area, but none of them would be reachable before sundown. Is there really not a single place close enough...

"Dust, what about that castle the Demon King's General turned into his base?"

"Oh, that'll do. You two would love it. That place has ties to the Demon King's army."

"Please, lead us to it!"

That place isn't exactly a dungeon, but as far as providing material to spin a tale out of, it should do just fine.

Part 5

"So this is the castle that Demon King's General was living in."

"It was the dullahan, Beldia, if I recall. The one that Kazuma-sama and his party defeated..."

The two nobles gawked around like a pair of tourists.

In the red rays of the setting sun, this old castle certainly has the atmosphere befitting that of the castle of a headless knight.

"I have seen it from a distance before, but this is..."

It seems like it was Yunyun's first time here too, if the note of wonder in her voice is

anything to go by.

“It’s a lot more sturdier than I expected.”

Lynn was tapping against the walls as she moved along, seemingly checking their structural integrity.

This castle was abandoned for a long time before the Demon King’s General, Beldia, turned this place into his hideout a few months ago.

He didn’t make any moves on the town of Axel, so the adventurers were happy to leave him be, but that situation didn’t last thanks to a certain crazy Explosion Girl and her penchant for casting Explosion every day.

“From what I’ve heard, the Crimson Demon in Kazuma’s party lured Beldia all the way to town with her magic, where the combined might of the adventurers managed to bring him down.”

Claire nodded, her voice brimming with admiration.

Well, that isn’t exactly wrong, but it isn’t exactly accurate either.

Not only did I not get any rewards from that incident, the flood that the party priest called down caused me to lose a small fortune. It’s not a pleasant memory.

“There may still be a few remnants of the Demon King’s army skulking around, so don’t let your guard down.”

Well, I say that, but that is very unlikely.

Treasure-seeking adventurer parties have swarmed all over this place after the defeat of Beldia. Not only that, but the guild has also posted multiple missions to try and get information on the Demon King’s army.

Every nook and cranny has been thoroughly scoured clean. There’s no way a member of the Demon King’s army could’ve stayed hidden here.

By now, it’s simply become a spot for the local residents to test their courage. Well, it does have a spooky atmosphere, so it will serve just fine for the purposes of those two nobles.

“Doesn’t this just get your heart pumping!?”

Yunyun is definitely enjoying this.

She happily chatted away as we proceeded down the corridor, excitedly poking her head into every room we came across.

Nothing particularly exciting happened, but Claire and Rain seemed content with simply exploring the castle. I haven’t heard a single word of complaint from either of them.

“This castle is really well put together. The surrounding earth has been almost completely churned up. A truly fierce battle must have taken place here for the land to be scarred this badly.”

“I suppose so. I can feel traces of high level magic all over the place. The adventurers of Axel and the remnants of the Demon King’s army must have clashed here. It seems like there was a mage capable of controlling some really powerful magic amongst them.”

It’s your prerogative to let your imaginations run wild, but this are all marks left by that Explosion Girl.

After receiving an Explosion each day, even a sturdy castle would be reduced to such a state. The childhood friend of the culprit of such destruction was shrinking and blushing as if it was her that was being talked about.

Come to think of it, I wonder if Sir Vanir knows the dullahan Beldia. He’s an Archdevil, after all.

I think I recall seeing a similar mask to Sir on a wanted poster with a bounty rivaling that of a Demon King’s General, but that must’ve been someone else who wore a similar mask.

“Still, unlike the exterior, the interior seems pretty well maintained. It’s hard to imagine it being the home base of an army of undead at one point.”

“There are traces of people passing through here, but apart from that, this place seems to have been kept pretty clean.”

The room that we entered seemed to be an old parlour of sorts, complete with a long table and a dusty sofa.

It's covered in a thin layer of dust right now, but it seems to have accumulated after the dullahan was defeated. Normally, you'd expect things to be far more run down in an old abandoned castle like this.

Taking a closer look, I noticed a bucket and a set of rags in the corner.

...Do undead sweep and clean too? It'd be quite a surreal sight if that was the case.

"Beldia was going on about being a knight and whatnot before he became a dullahan, so maybe he still liked things clean even after he died. At a glance, it seems like he took pretty good care of this place."

"Even though he's an undead? There's no way... Umm, maybe it's time we took a break? We could have some tea in this room..."

The prospect of enjoying a tea party inside a castle must be quite appealing to Yunyun. She retrieved a teapot from her bag along with a seemingly endless stream of teacups.

Is this why her bag is so huge?

"Well, we did run around a lot. I shall gladly take you up on that offer."

"Allow me to lend you a hand, Yunyun-san."

Claire sank down deep into the sofa, and Rain busied herself with preparing the tea alongside Yunyun.

Lynn helped out with arranging the cutlery and teacups on the table.

I would really like to take a seat on the sofa too, but somehow I get the feeling that sitting next to Claire wouldn't end too well.

Instead, I took a seat on the end of the table furthest from her.

Once the preparations were done, Claire and Rain ended up sitting next to each other, and Lynn and Yunyun took up seats on either side of me.

Yunyun fidgeted nervously as the others helped themselves to the tea and snacks.

You really should just come out and say it if you have something to say, but this loner...

“This tea is quite delicious.”

“That’s great~ I got it from a highly recommended shop in Axel.”

“It must have cost quite a bit. It has a great fragrance too...”

“W-Well, it is from a high-end shop...”

Thanks to Rain speaking up at just the right time, Yunyun didn’t have to stew in her discomfort for very long.

Though, listening to such a stiff conversation makes me itch for some reason. There’s nothing pleasant hearing two people tread so softly around each other.

Lynn simply enjoyed her tea in silence. She’s being unusually quiet today. I would’ve expected her to start up a conversation with someone, but I guess she has times when she’s shy too.

Or perhaps she’s simply nervous about interacting with nobility.

Feeling bored, I rummaged around Yunyun’s bag that she left by the sofa.

It isn’t long before I felt a something against my hand. Taking it out, it turned out to be a wooden box just about the size of my fist.

“Say, what’s this?”

“That’s the magic item that Wiz-san gave me... Hey, you went into my bag again!?”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff. So you got this for free?”

Yunyun’s face turned red as she started complaining at me, but I ignored her and opened the lid of the box.

Inside is a large crystal orb with countless glowing sparkles floating within its depths.

It might roll off if I simply placed it on the table, so I improvised a cushion out of the nearby rag before placing it on top.

“Seriously, what is this? It looks like something a fortune teller would use.”

“This is the first time I’ve seen what’s inside, so don’t ask me. Umm, I’m pretty sure the manual is in the box... Ah, there it is! It says that something will happen if multiple people pour their mana into it... Hmm? I feel like I’ve seen a crystal orb like this before...”

Yunyun trailed off.

“You probably just saw it when it was on display at the store. This orb seems interesting, but will it really not work unless you pour mana into it? I won’t be able to make use of it in that case. Why don’t you give it a try, Yunyun?”

“Wiz-san gave this to me, so it shouldn’t be anything weird, but I swear I’ve seen this somewhere before...”

Yunyun continued making strange faces as she stared at the crystal orb.

“What about you, Lynn?”

“I’m not interested.”

How cold. Why is she in such a bad mood? I’ve even made sure not to cause too many problems today. At least, not compared to my usual days.

I’ll just get burned if I try to engage with her right now. It’s best to leave her alone.

“Alright, then, why don’t you two give it a shot? It might make for a good story to tell Alice when you return.”

“I suppose so. We still don’t really have much to tell her.”

“I don’t mind giving it a try.”

They said it in a carefree manner, but they certainly do seem more into it than I expected.

The two of them placed their hands on the crystal orb and started pouring mana into it.

After a short moment, a dark purple glow came from the orb and the surroundings suddenly turned dark.

“H-Hey, this isn’t dangerous, is it!?”

The sudden change caused shivers to flow down my spine, and Yunyun’s eyes lit up like she just made some sort of realization.

“Oh, I remember now! This is the friendmaking crystal!”

“Huh?”

Before I could do anything more, several rectangular boards of light appeared around the crystal orb.

“What is this? There’s something moving on those boards...”

The one closest to me showed a scene of a plainly dressed girl, Rain, repeatedly bowing to an angry-looking old man.

“Ah, that’s from when I got chewed out for giving Vanir-dono all that money!”

Another screen showed a heavily breathing Claire laying on an expensive-looking bed as she stared at Alice’s sleeping face.

“What’s with this image!? How do you know my nightly routine!? Staring at Alice-sama’s face before sleeping gives me the most wonderful dreams!”

...She does this every day?

I’m seriously worried she might actually cross the line someday.

“Um, this item exposes the embarrassing memories of those who provide mana to it in order to deepen their bonds of friendship towards each other... supposedly.”

Yet another screen showed a somewhat younger looking Rain walking into an expensive-looking restaurant alongside a few other nobles. As the others were

ordering, she reached into her wallet...

“Er-My stomach doesn’t feel so good.”

She muttered, before satisfying herself with only a cup of water.

I knew she was fairly poor as a noble, but I didn’t expect her to be this hard pressed.

“Don’t look! How do you stop this!?”

She has stopped supplying it with mana, but the various screens don’t seem to be fading away.

Pretty much all of the scenes that Claire appears in involve Alice in some way. Most of them depict her staring at her in a dangerous way or spoiling her rotten, but one of them has Claire looking coldly at a younger looking Alice.

There isn’t even a hint of a smile on her face. It’s hard to imagine Claire ever being capable of looking at Alice this coldly given her usual behavior.

Claire noticed where I was looking and let out a small sigh.

“That’s from when we first met. All I felt back then was bitterness from being passed over for the position of her brother’s educator. It’s really nothing to be proud of.”

I seem to recall her saying something about Alice not being her first choice back when she was drunk.

So she had a time where she wasn’t head over heels with Alice.

“Becoming Justi... Her brother’s educator was your dream, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, it was. I had high hopes of being in charge of that person who had extreme potential in both looks and talent, but when my appointed position was made known to me... I was stuck with a fragile-looking girl. My eyes were really clouded back then... I couldn’t see how wonderful Alice-sama was.”

Well, I suppose anyone would be just as disappointed if they were lead to believe that they’d be in charge of the first prince of the country.

“How could I have been so blind!? No matter how little time she could spend with her family who are constantly at the front lines, no matter how much she’s hurting inside, she still kept smiling without showing any of it! It’s that strength that won me over!”

Watching her enthusiastically declare that with such exaggerated movements honestly kind of annoys me.

As I started searching for some other interesting scene to focus my attention on, I noticed one that doesn’t seem to feature either of the nobles.

“Hmm... wait, this is...”

Drawn by my surprised voice, everyone else turned to look at the same screen.

That screen depicted a black-armoured knight holding a helmet under his arm- A dullahan.

“So this will be my residence from today onwards... Terrain-wise, the hill makes it easily defensible, and the view is great too. Let’s start with a little spring cleaning.”

The dullahan placed his head on the desk, pulled out a rag from the bucket and started scrubbing the walls and floor.

He happily hummed along as he worked.

“This will take some time. Undead knights, lend me a hand!”

The knights with rotten bodies and tattered armour followed his orders, quickly picking up brooms and rags and getting to work.

The next scene depicted the dullahan contentedly walking around a much cleaner looking castle.

He brushed his fingers against the windowsill to check his work, and it came away without a single speck of dust.

“Well, this has turned into quite a nice place, hasn’t it? Now that I’ve secured a base of operations, I suppose I should focus on building up my forces-”

His musings were suddenly interrupted by a loud boom.

The screen shook violently, and pieces of rubble fell from the ceiling. The dullahan was so shocked that he almost lost his grip on his head.

“What the!? What’s going on!?”

He hastily thrust his head out a nearby window. Scorch marks have been left along the wall, along with several newly made holes. Furthermore, the interior has been turned into a complete mess from the shockwave.

This... looks like the work of that Explosion Girl.

“Just what was that...”

The dullahan seemed rattled, but he quickly regained his wits and started assessing the damage, repairing what he could alongside his undead knights.

“Could that have been the work of the adventurers of Axel? Hmm, no matter, that town of newbies probably did this as a test of their courage. It would be unseemly to get angry over such a small matter. As the general of the Demon King’s army, I shall be the bigger man and let them off this time.”

He moved his head in a nodding motion, even as it was held under his arm.

“That sound was Megumin’s Explosion, right? ... As her rival, I’m really ashamed of her. On the other hand, the dullahan seems like a real gentleman. He’s a Demon King’s general, but he’s completely different from what I imagined.”

“I agree, but why is it showing the dullahan’s memories?”

“It’s just my speculation, but perhaps this item is picking up some residual magic from the rag beneath it?”

I don’t really get it, but I’ll just nod along to Rain’s explanation.

The rag the crystal orb is resting on does seem to be the same one that the dullahan is holding.

“This one shows the dullahan too. We might be able to get some good information on the Demon King’s army.”

Claire ignored the screens that showed images of the nobles and focused squarely on the ones featuring the dullahan.

It certainly seemed more interesting than delving in the past of these two, so I joined her as well.

One screen showed the dullahan dropping a vase in shock as a loud boom interrupted him while he was carrying it. The vase shattered into pieces.

Yet another screen showed him standing in front of a newly-repaired piece of wall, wiping the sweat off his helmet. At that exact moment, a loud explosion turned it into rubble yet again.

And the next screen showed him just about to sink into the sofa after a day of hard work, when the sky outside his window glowed red and the tremors started.

He leapt off his seat just in time to watch a large segment of wall be reduced to rubble.

“Just what kind of grudge do you have against me!?”

His anguished cries echoed throughout the castle as he threw his own head against the ground.

“...This is horrible...”

Claire and Rain muttered at the same time.

“Even I can’t bring myself to do something this nasty.”

“I’ve never put much thought into this before, but Megumin is really...”

“I feel like I want to apologize to dullahan-san...”

I never thought there’d come a day where I would sympathize with a General of the Demon King’s army.

The next few scenes showed the dullahan trying to keep up with the repairs as the castle gets ever more dilapidated due to the daily explosions, until he finally lost his patience.

“Every day, every single day they blast the place with magic! That’s it! And here I thought I’d let them off easy because they’re a town of beginners!”

The dullahan hefted his greatsword and dashed out of the room.

A different screen showed the dullahan back in the room, a spring in his step as he busied himself with cleaning up.

“After casting Premonition of Death on her, that crazy Crimson Demon girl will surely come charging in here with her friends. I have to prepare a few traps as well as a few rounded hit squads to face them. Still, I shouldn’t make things too difficult. It wouldn’t do if they were to die before I have the chance to entertain them myself.”

Saying that, he called out to his undead knights and began a strategy meeting.

It might just be my imagination, but he seems to be really enjoying it.

The next day, the dullahan went about setting traps and cleaning up, but the castle shook again just like it had in the days before.

Dashing outside, a new hole has been blown into the walls of the castle. In addition, the tremors from the explosion has ruined all of his traps.

“They-They’re still doing this...”

The scene ended just as he dropped his head in disbelief.

All of us sat on the sofa in silence. None of us could say anything.

Yunyun rested her face in her hands and let out a huge sigh.

“...So, did this give you any ideas on how to deal with the Demon King’s army?”

“No comment.”

It might’ve been a Demon King’s general, but it seems like even they held some reservations about the Explosion Girl’s methods.

“But, um, she has her good sides too. Like being thrifty with money and willing to eat anything...”

Yunyun hastily tried to cover for her friend, but at this point, it's hard to tell who exactly is the subordinate of the Demon King.

Lynn was staring intently at the screen with a frown, even after it faded to white.

"What's wrong?"

"That showed the dullahan in this very room, right? He was doing something at that pillar next to the wall. Isn't it this one?"

She said before moving over to that pillar.

I followed her because it piqued my interest, but it just looks like a normal pillar to me.

"If only we had a thief amongst our party... There isn't any dust around here. Did someone touch it recently? There's something sticking out..."

I heard a clicking noise, and the floor in front of the pillar slowly shifted away, revealing a stairway leading further below.

"This must be a secret passage. Well, it's not unthinkable for such a thing to be in a castle."

"Indeed. It might be an escape route or a passage that leads to a hidden panic room for use in case of emergencies."

The two nobles appeared behind me before I realized it, commenting on the stairwell as though it was an everyday fixture.

"Wow, it's just like the story I recently read! The princess and her imperial knight used a similar passage to escape from a burning castle, hand in hand!"

Ignoring Yunyun who was off in a world of her own, I peered into the depths of the stairwell.

It's hard to see very far in the dim lighting, but it seems to stretch on for quite a while.

"If the dullahan was using this passage, it wouldn't be surprising for there to be documents or treasure hidden away here! Treasure would be best!"

What an unexpected chance for some extra income!

If I land a windfall here, I wouldn't need to concern myself with money for quite a while.

"Then we have no choice but to head in! If we recover some important information here, Alice-sama will surely be overjoyed!"

"If we get our hands on something important here, we might even be able to get rewarded by the king himself!"

Claire and Rain seemed to be on board too.

"I-I'm interested too!"

Yunyun excitedly raised her hand in support.

"Hmm, I'd rather not let those two nobles do anything too dangerous, but it doesn't seem like there's any chance of convincing them otherwise."

"There you have it. I'll go prepare the lantern."

Lynn's probably nervous because we don't have our full party here. It'd be great if Taylor and Keith were with us, but there's nothing we can do about it now.

"I'll go first. Don't make too much noise now."

Normally, the heavily-armoured Taylor would go first, but in this situation, I have no choice but to take the lead.

Claire is too ill-armoured to be the vanguard, and the rest of the party are mages.

Furthermore, if I was at the lead, I'd be able to get first pick of anything valuable we happen to stumble upon!

Taking the lantern in my hand, I carefully headed down the stairs.

The marching order is me, Lynn, and Yunyun, followed by a small gap before Rain, and Claire bringing up the rear.

The walls and ceiling look to be made out of solid stone, so it doesn't seem like it'll collapse on us. The fact that the stairway keeps going down makes it highly likely that it leads to a treasure room instead of being an escape route.

Looks like I can expect to get something out of this.

"I wonder what kind of treasure they are keeping here?"

It'd be boring just heading down in silence, so I tried starting some small talk.

"It's the hideout of a Demon King's general, so wouldn't it be arms and armour and the like?"

"You don't have a sense of romance at all, Lynn. What about you, Yunyun? What do you think?"

"Um, couldn't it be a friend dullahan-san had while he was alive? Like, he was hiding a girl away in such a place..."

If the dullahan really did have someone hidden down here, I can't imagine her being anything other than a prisoner. One kidnapped for unsavory purposes.

From his appearance alone, he certainly gives off the impression of being capable of something like that.

The spiral staircase eventually led to a small, circular room. There's only a single door on the walls, and it's locked with a heavy padlock.

I strained my ears, but I couldn't hear anything coming from the other side of the door. Doesn't seem like there is anything living here.

"Well, we don't have any thieves with us, so we'll have to force our way through. Don't let your guard down. There might be monsters or traps lying in wait."

Part 6

It took awhile, but the lock eventually broke apart after repeated blows from the pommel of my sword.

I carefully inched the door open and peeked into the room.

Inside was a tuxedo-wearing, masked devil sitting on a chair that resembled a throne.

“Fuhaha! Moi is glad you brave heroes made it here! Those dark emotions of having your expectations betrayed are quite delicious indeed!”

“Vanir-san!?”

“...Sir, what are you doing?”

I stared blankly at Sir as he rose up from the throne.

It's so far outside of my expectations that I couldn't even act surprised.



“Well, after hearing that there is an abandoned castle out here, Moi visited this place multiple times to check if it’d be useful in my goal to create the ultimate dungeon. This hidden room was discovered during one of my visits, and it’s low humidity and temperature made it perfect for storing foodstuff, so that’s what Moi has been using it for.”

So that’s why there are crates stacked up all around the throne.

“Umm, you’re Vanir-dono, right? It’s been some time.”

“You helped us out a lot the last time we met.”

Oh, yeah, come to think of it, Claire and Rain knew Sir, right? The three of them were together when I first ran into them.

“Oh, if it isn’t the plain girl with barely any presence and the girl who would make a move on her master if it weren’t for her sense of loyalty.”

“P-Plain...”

“T-That’s not true at all! My affections towards her are completely platonic! I possess no such ill intentions!”

Rain fell into a depression whereas Claire hastily refuted that label.

That’s definitely a lie. The way she conducts herself towards Alice is far beyond that of simple protectiveness.

“Just what are you, Vanir-dono? You’re clearly not an ordinary person, and you don’t strike me as an adventurer either.”

Toward Claire’s question, Sir simply stroked his chin and laughed.

“Has my master not said that Moi is Hachibei? Is there truly a need for any other explanation?”

“I... suppose so. My apologies.”

Seriously, you’re convinced with that?

“Sir, what is a Hachibei? And master?”

“That is a secret. Everyone has one or two things they want to keep to themselves. Isn’t that right, delinquent adventurer who hides his past?”

The last part was said in a whisper just loud enough that I was the only one who can hear it.

Well, if you put it that way, there really isn’t much I can say.

“It must be some sort of fate for us to meet here, especially for your team to be mostly women. Would you care to try the new product that Moi created?”

Sir retrieved a small paper bag from one of the crates.

The words “Diet pills” were written in large letters across it.

Wait, could these be the products made from the fruits of the tranquility girl...

“This is a miraculous snack that will never make you fat no matter how much of it you consume. Despite that, it’s both filling and delicious. It truly is the ultimate snack!”

“Vanir-dono, do you work as a merchant? Even though you are strong enough to easily brush away a knight!?”

“I think I recall him saying that he runs a consultation corner and works part time at a magic item store before we parted ways...”

Rain seemed extremely surprised, while Claire folded her arms and fell into deep thought.

“Sometimes, Moi is Hachibei. Other times, Moi runs a consultation corner. And yet other times, Moi is a part timer at a magic item store. That is the sort of person Moi is!”

With that sort of explanation, I can’t help but think of him as a suspicious person.

He didn’t say it, but he’s also an Archdevil, so that just makes it more suspicious.

“Leaving that aside, Moi shall offer you a special discount, so why don’t you buy a few?”

As a snack that would go well with tea, it'd be the perfect gift to offer to your master. It's also perfect for people who are worried about their waistline due to their security duties preventing them from getting much time to exercise."

"Uck."

Rain and Claire gulped at the same time.

Seems like that comment struck pretty close to the mark.

"It certainly sounds appealing, but it's hard to imagine that such a remarkable item really works as advertised. "

"Indeed. Though, if it's real..."

It seems like they are still unable to take the final step of putting down money for it.

Sir shifted his gaze towards Lynn. Changing targets, huh?

"What about you? Even though you've been skipping out on adventuring recently, haven't you still been eating the same amount of food? Have you been taking care to make use of all the calories you're taking in? Have you been slacking off just because you don't have anyone to show your body to?"

"Wha!? O-Of course not."

You don't sound convincing at all if you say that while covering your belly, Lynn.

Nodding contentedly, Sir turned his attention over to Yunyun.

"I-I'm not buying them no matter what you say!"

"This product hasn't been released yet, so no one is really talking about it, but there is no doubt that it shall become a great hit. The stocks will soon run out, and the town will be full of girls who are looking for this product. What do you suppose will happen then if, say, someone were to have a large stock of it on hand?"

"T-They would ask that person for some of it..."

"Indeed! Even if you do not use it, by simply buying a box of my product, you shall

surely become very popular. The amount of friends you have shall surely exceed your ability to keep track of them. On account of our friendship, Moi shall offer them to you for a very special discount.”

“F-Friends...”

Yunyun floatily walked towards Sir.

It’s too late for her. She’s completely done for.

Sir really is amazing at this. If he didn’t shackle himself to that eternally broke shopkeeper, he would surely be far richer than he is now, but he must have something in mind.

“Of course, it’s merely natural to have some doubts when faced with such a convenient-sounding item. Moi shall provide a sample, so go ahead and dig in.”

The items he retrieved from the bag are a series of bite-sized manjus, each bearing an image of Sir’s mask.

The girls all looked at it with interest, but none of them reached out to grab it. Well, I understand where they are coming from. It certainly does smell fishy.

“Good grief, are you still suspicious of it? Moi has confirmed that it is safe for consumption, so there’s no need to worry on that front. That useless shopkeeper sung its praises when she ate one a few days back. Now she always eats one before every meal. It’s to the point where Moi fears that she might finish all of it, so Moi decided to move the stocks over here.”

The girl’s frown deepened after listening to Sir’s story. It doesn’t seem to have eased their distrust at all.

If what he said is true, the addictive effect from the original fruit might still be active... Is this really safe?

Putting some distance between me and the rest, I moved over to Sir and whispered into his ear.

“...Sir, this is really harmless to the human body, right?”

“That has already been tested. It causes cravings for more of it, but apart from that, there are no other side effects. The hallucinative effects have been completely removed. It is indeed good for dieting, but it still contains enough nutrition that one cannot die from starvation. The cravings will fade away within about a week, so there’s no need to worry about that either.”

If that’s the case, then there shouldn’t be... no, there is a problem.

I still have a few reservations, but while Sir enjoys tricking humans, he doesn’t kill them, so I can put my trust in him.

“Ideally, Moi would like to spread it all over the town and get a lot of people addicted to it before it sells out. Five days later, Moi shall acquire new stock, and the women in town will rush to get their hands on it. Just as Moi starts selling the stocks of these products, a mysterious explosion shall turn all of them into ash. Don’t you think Moi will be able to taste the best dark emotions in that situation?”

“You might be able to obtain dark emotions, but I really doubt you’ll be able to make it out safely after making an enemy out of all the women in town.”

The obsession that women have to become beautiful is a terrifying thing.

You can’t complain if you get killed after doing something like this.

Glancing over to the side, it seems like the others are still on the fence about this issue.

“Moi does not know what you’re concerned about, but if you are not buying it, Moi shall move on to some other product. Moi has plenty of other appealing products on hand.”

As Sir moved to stow away the items, the hand holding the manjus were instantly grabbed by everyone else at the same time.

“Could you please wait for a moment? F-Fine, it’s for the sake of my waistline! I’ll have one!”

“I-I understand. I’ll do this together with you, Claire-sama!”

“I suppose I’ll have one too.”

“I-In that case, I don’t want to be left out, so I’ll eat one too!”

After getting one manju each, the four of them looked at each other and brought them to their mouths at the same time.

“It’s delicious!!”

They exclaimed.

“This sweetness and rich fragrance! It even goes down easily! I’ve only eaten one of them, but I can already feel a sense of fullness!”

Claire’s eyes sparkled as she sung praises about it.

For a noble used to eating good food every day to regard it this highly, it must be quite delicious indeed.

I’d really like to give it a taste myself but...

“Aah, I can’t get enough! It’s so delicious that I can’t stop!”

“What is this!? Oh my god, I can’t get enough.”

“I really want to give Megumin a taste too, but I have to get my fill here first.”

After seeing the women frantically snatching bun after bun from the bag, I gave up on that notion.

They were going after it with the same ferocity that the undead would go after the living. Is this really okay?

“Okay, that’s enough! Moi is not running a charity! If you want any more of it, you’re going to have to pay!”

Lynn and the others tried to move on to the other boxes in the room after cleaning out the bag, only to be kept in check by Sir.

Yunyun and Lynn ended up buying quite a few bags.

Claire and Rain bought an entire crate.

“I knew my gaze wasn’t mistaken. Allow me to present you high rolling customers with a special Vanir-style mask. It is certain to make your master happy. You may have one too as thanks for introducing such generous customers to me.”

Sir produced a pair of identical masks and gave one of them to me.

“Ahh, how nice~”

Yunyun sighed longingly as she looked at the mask in my hand.

I’ve heard that this is a surprisingly popular item. I’ll sell it to Yunyun if I ever run into problems with money.

“Alice-sama will probably be happy with this, but is it really okay to give it to her? She’s gotten really fond of chivalrous thieves ever since that incident, so this might just make things worse.”

“Indeed. It seems like she has been quite interested in imitating a chivalrous thief as of late. It’d be quite problematic for someone of her position to head down the path of a thief.”

The first princess of a nation getting involved with thieves, really? You two should really do a better job as her guardians.

...The chivalrous thieves they are talking about is that pair of silver-haired thieves that only target nobles with bad reputations that I’ve been hearing a lot about recently, right? They were using a mask similar to Sir Vanir’s to hide their faces or something.

Not too long ago, the Explosion Girl and Yunyun formed a group to support that thieving band and tried to recruit me into it.

If I recall, Alice was with them too... Oh, I see. I finally understand how they are all linked together.

Anyway, this seemed to satisfy their desire for adventure, so after helping them move the crate back to the teleport station and seeing them off, the request was finally complete.

They properly paid me for my services, so I have no complaints, but are they really satisfied with that? It feels like they had nothing on their minds other than Sir’s

products.

Lynn and Yunyun too quickly headed home with their bags of newly purchased products in hand.

I moved to head back home too, but Sir stopped me.

“There is no doubt that this will sell. There is also no doubt that Moi shall be short handed. You shall be properly compensated, so what do you think about lending me a hand?”

“Ah, sorry Sir, I’ve gotten my hands on some money, so I intend to spend my time relaxing leisurely for the foreseeable future.”

“Is that so? That is a pity. Moi was thinking of giving you an employee discount and preferential purchase rights. Once this item becomes a hit and sells out, the girls in this town would not stand idly by if they learnt that a certain man has gotten his hands on a large amount of stock in advance. It truly is a pity, but Moi would not force you into this.”

“What are you saying? There’s no need to be so distant. We’re friends, aren’t we? Of course I’ll help!”

I firmly grasped Sir’s outstretched hand.

After helping Sir Vanir move his products back into his store, I’m currently enjoying a cup of tea that Wiz thoughtfully provided for me.

“Hmm, what would you say to some cheap wine to go with that?”

“Wine? Hmm, I’m sure there’s a good bottle lying around here...”

“You really are the ideal of a delinquent, as usual. If all you want is alcohol, you can get it from a hand wash. More importantly, the products I left here seem to have gone missing...”

Seeing Wiz avert her gaze and start acting twitchy, I finished the last of my tea and stood up.

There’s no doubt that she did something and is about to get yelled at.

“Sir, I’ll swing by tomorrow to talk about the business stuff again.”

It’s best to get out of here before I get dragged into it.

Wiz was pleading at me with her teary eyes not to leave, but I ignored her. Usually, I’d at least try to entertain the request of a beautiful lady, but I’m not foolish enough to go up against Sir.

“What did you do with the two masks I left here!? Those are special, high grade items that can swap the spirit of those who wear them...”

I heard Sir’s angry voice start up the moment I stepped through the door, so I quickly made haste from the store.

A small flash lit up the shop as I left. That must be the mysterious beams that Sir shoots from his eyes.

With the image of Wiz burnt to a crisp in my mind, I hurried over to the guild.

My pockets are bursting with gold today. I’m going to drink my fill!

Part 7

My vision is blurry.

It feels like my eyes are covered in fog, and I can’t be sure of where I am right at the moment.

Furthermore, it feels like my field of view has been narrowed. It’s almost like I’m wearing a mask of some sort...

I felt my hands impact something hard when I moved them towards my face.

Oh, yeah, I remember getting drunk and crawling into a bed somewhere.

The lights were too bright, it was too bothersome to extinguish them, so I used the mask that Sir gave to me as a blindfold. At least, that what I think my thought process was.

“Isn’t that the souvenir we brought back for Iris-sama? What are you doing wearing it, Rain? Ah, well, I guess it’s fine. She might be more inclined to listen to us if you have it on. Anyway, let’s hurry up and go.”

This voice is Claire, right?

Why is Claire in my room... And she just said Iris just now, right? Wouldn’t there be a lot of problems if she leaks the secret to me?

While such thoughts crawled through my mind, I followed after Claire in a daze.

My vision was gradually becoming clearer, so I could get a better grasp of my surroundings.

A very expensive-looking carpet was laid on the hallway I was walking down.

Looking up, the ceiling was needlessly high, and sported an extremely extravagant chandelier that illuminated our path.

“Huh!? Where is this place!?”

“Why are you shouting all of a sudden? Did you sneak in a few drinks or something? It sounds stupid to point out the obvious, but this is clearly the royal castle.”

...What?

Just as my face turned pale, the surroundings suddenly became clear.

Countless high quality items furnished the hallway I was standing in. The hallway itself extended far enough that I couldn’t make out the end of it.

It was still dark out, but the lights from the houses were so numerous that they rivaled the stars twinkling in the night sky.

Wow, so this is how the city looks like at night from the castle.

...This feels quite realistic, but this has got to be a dream.

“What’s wrong, Rain? Iris-sama is awaiting us. There’s no time for you to stand around in a daze.”

So in this dream, I've turned into Rain, huh?

I don't remember it, but I must have stumbled into the succubus shop in a drunken haze and told Loli Succubus all about what happened today while ordering a sweet dream.

I still regret not being able to see them naked at the lake, that's why I asked for a dream with them in a lewd position. Yeah, that must be it.

That's some pretty good deduction, if I do say so myself. I didn't get myself blackout drunk all those times for nothing.

In that case, I'll play along in my role. I want to see exactly how good Loli Succubus has gotten with her dreamcrafting.

"Please wait for me, Claire... sama."

This is how Rain spoke, right?

Heading down the corridor, we eventually came to a stop in front of a very expensive-looking set of double doors. This is Iris's room, I suppose.

Still, when did Loli Succubus get such detailed knowledge of the interior of the imperial castle? Everything from the design of the hallway to the decorations on display seemed quite authentic for such a castle.

Ah, she must have based it off an old castle or something she studied. Not bad. I'll give her ten points.

Claire softly cleared her throat, but took no further action.

It seems like she's hesitant to call out to Iris because she's angry with her.

She didn't slack off on the mundane build-up. I don't mind immediately starting with the erotic stuff, but taking the time to set up the scene isn't bad either. I'll give her another five points.

Seems like my criticism has finally borne fruit. This must be how a master feels when he sees his disciple grow. I'll take stock of your full capabilities today!

“Are you not going to call out to Iris-sama?”

“I know! But, whenever I think about her rejecting me again...”

“It’ll be fine. Iris-sama is simply sulking. I’m sure she’s looking forward to hearing Claire-sama’s voice too.”

I encouraged her with a gentle smile.

...That acting is perfect! It’s good enough that anyone looking on would think it’s a pity that I became an adventurer.

Since Loli Succubus prepared such a great stage for me, I shall give her the best Rain act I can pull off in response.

“I-Is that so? Yeah, of course. Right!... Iris-sama, it’s Claire.”

She knocked against the door.

After a short silence...

“What is it...?”

An annoyed-sounding voice came from the other side of the door.

There is a little anger in her voice, but it really does sound like a child throwing a tantrum than anything else.

“I went too far the other day. I apologize for that.”

“Then you’ll let me meet with Onii-sama?”

“No, I cannot sanction that. That man is a bad influence on you!”

“I hate you!”

Oh, she sure doesn’t hold back, does she?

And now Claire has collapsed onto the floor.

I suppose she set this situation up so I, as Rain, could pick up after her and reach a better payoff once the erotic stuff starts.

“Iris-sama, we went to visit Axel today.”

“Eh? Axel!? Really!?”

I heard a loud smack on the other side of the door. Did Iris hit her head after getting too excited?

“Yes. Claire-sama and I went down to do some research so we could preten... give you the experience of what being an adventurer is like.”

“I can become an adventurer!?!... You aren’t lying, are you?”

“It’s the truth. Isn’t that right, Claire-sama?”

“Yes, indeed! We can’t move freely right now due to that issue with the neighbouring Elroad, but once that has been taken care off, we should have some free time for that.”

The door opened a crack, and Iris popped her head out and looked at Claire with puppy dog eyes.

“It’s... It’s a promise, okay?”

“Of course! I swear on the name of the Symphonia family!”

“Then, I’ll forgive you.”

Iris broke into a wide smile.

It’s an innocent smile, yet it has a certain royal elegance to it. Seeing that, Claire took a step back.

“*Pant pant*... What is this overflowing emotion...”



...That's called Lust, I'm pretty sure.

There really aren't any normal folks amongst the nobles.

"Ah, it's almost time for my bath. I've been so cooped up in my room all day that I almost forgot about it."

And here's the standard bath event.

It really is a great set-up for erotic scenes, like having the guy and the girl end up in the mixed baths without realizing it.

It's a cliché, but it's the good kind of cliché.

You really do get it, Loli Succubus. I'll add another 20 points for that.

"Yes, it is. It's been some time, but how about we take one together? We can talk all about the adventures we had in Axel."

"That'd be great! You can also tell me why Rain is wearing such a cool-looking mask too."

"We ran into Vanir-sama as we. I'll tell you all about it."

"Then, let's make haste! Claire, too, stop trembling by the wall and come with us."

Iris grabbed onto Claire's hand and pulled her along.

Claire, her face wrought with barely contained glee, turned back and gave me a thumbs up.

Now, all the setup is done. I can join them in the baths as Rain too.

I followed the two into the dressing room, and they have already started undressing.

"W-Wait, Claire, that tickles!"

"W-We're both women, so there's nothing to be embarrassed about. *Pant Pant*. Come on, let's go."

A girl laughing as she twisted her body and Claire, approaching her with heavy breaths.

You really can't see her as anything other than a suspicious person. But, right now, I'm thankful for that.

I can confidently declare that there isn't a single man on this world who can pry their gazes away from two young ladies wrestling with each other!

"I can undress myself, so please don't stare at me!"

"I-I see. Then I'll strip too! That'll make us even, right!?"

Iris and Claire both started stripping down right in front of me.

I never got a good look at Claire's assets because of the white suit she usually wears, but she's really packing some nice goods underneath.

Her breasts practically popped right out the moment she unbuttoned her jacket.

Iris started removing her clothes too while keeping an eye on where Claire was looking.

Her skin is as unblemished and clear as porcelain. She has a very promising future ahead of her.

The three stooges would probably get excited upon seeing this, but I personally still prefer someone with a more filled out body.

Just as I was thinking that, the two of them grabbed their towels and pushed past the door separating the dressing room from the baths.

"Right, now all the cloth that stood between us has vanished! Let's have some skinship!"

"Your eyes are scaring me... What are you doing? You can't join us if you don't take off your clothes, you know?"

Looking at my still clothed form, Iris pestered me to hurry up and take them off.

Rather than being suspicious of my clothed state, it's more like she's concerned over being alone in the baths with Claire.

"I got... I understand."

It'd arouse their suspicions if I didn't strip here. Keeping my current role as Rain in mind, I made sure to use the same polite language that Rain would use.

I've never worn women's clothing before, and it's actually quite tricky to remove.

Furthermore, I'm still wearing the mask that Sir gave to me, so my field of vision is narrow and it's actually a little hard to see.

Well, this mask came with the setting, so there's no need to keep it on. I also want to take a good look at Rain's body that Loli Succubus made for me.

Right, I'll just take it off-

Part 8

"Eh?"

The people at the familiar guild tavern were in extremely high spirits as they raised a toast.

What the hell? Was I woken up from that dream?

I was this close from the best scene!

Come on, don't show me a dream while I'm passed out at the bar. Wait till I climb into a proper bed!

But, hold on, I'm pretty sure I went back to my room after drinking my fill. Was that part of the dream too?

Don't tell me this is part of the dream?

I punched myself to test that theory.

Yeah, it hurts. This is definitely reality.

"Why did you suddenly start punching your face? Are you alright?"

The one who said that was Taylor.

He seemed to be a few cups deep too, if his beet red face is anything to go by.

“It’s too late to say you’re joking now. Well, you already paid up, so even if you back out, you ain’t getting it back.”

Keith patted me on the back in a jovial mood.

Lynn isn’t here, but it seems like I was having a drink together with my companions and the rest of the folks in the tavern.

“Ah~ I was having a weird dream. I was wearing Sir Vanir’s mask...

“You’re still wearing it, aren’t you?”

Keith pointed at my face, and just as he said, I was wearing a mask.

I took it off, placed it on the desk and stared at it.

What’s with this nagging feeling? Hmm, after I got drunk, I went back to my room and collapsed on the bed. The next thing I knew, I was at the capital.

And when I woke up from my dream, I’m right here.

“Say, when did I come to the tavern?”

I asked my two comrades a simple question.

“You are acting really funny today. We came here to catch up over drinks after hearing that you made it back, and you were here acting all strange while wearing that mask of yours. That’s when we called you over to join us.”

“You were really polite and feminine sounding for a while. It was uncanny. You really should take care when you drink in the future. After you had a few drinks, you said ‘Ah, so I’m dreaming! I’ve always wanted to know what it feels like to have so much money to spare that I can treat others!’ and declared that tonight’s drinks are on you.”

So I got blackout drunk, huh.

Wait, hold on, did Taylor say something weird just now?

“Wait, what did you say?”

“You were really polite-”

“Not that part, the bit at the end.”

“What’s with you all of a sudden? The part where you said tonight’s drinks are on you?”

Taylor gave me a puzzled look.

Keith on the other hand was giving me an exasperated one.

The patrons at the bar made toast after toast and freely ordered more drinks and snacks.

“You’ve been really generous recently, Dust! Don’t mind if I indulge myself tonight!”

“Give me every single item on the menu! Drinks bought on someone else’s dime always tastes better! Food you don’t have to work for is the best!”

“Bring me the most expensive alcohol in this store! I’ll going to drink till I drop!”

Wait, you’re kidding right? If I’m paying for everyone here, all the money I earned today is going to go up in smoke.

“Hey, no, don’t drink anymore! Don’t bring out anything else! Wait, let go of me!”

I tried to rein in the damage, but it seems like all the money I paid up front was already used up.

Never mind my profits being wiped out, I actually ended up in the hole.

Chapter 4

A Dreamy Night for that Princess

Part 1

“Sir! What the hell is up with this mask!”

The magic item shop.

I ran back here to lodge my complaints, shifting Wiz who was collapsed in the middle of the store to the corner as I ran in.

Sir Vanir took one look at the mask I was holding and placed his hand against his forehead.

“So it was the mask Moi gave to you yesterday after all. Is this useless shopkeeper fated to always do something unnecessary?”

Sir gave Wiz whom I just shifted an intense glare.

“Don’t keep it to yourself, tell me about it too. Just what is this mask?”

“That’s an item I came up with after observing another magic item. It’s an interesting item that comes in a set of two and switches the spirits of two people if both masks are worn at the same time.”

In other words, my spirit ended up in Rain’s body, and hers ended up in mine.

“So what happened yesterday wasn’t a dream... Dammit! If only I knew, I could’ve done some much more amusing things, like fondle my breasts or strike erotic poses in front of a mirror, or hit on a handsome looking man before spurning him just as things get heated!”

I fell to my knees and repeatedly punched the ground to vent my frustrations.

There were so many things I wanted to try out. If only I had known!

“From what the songbirds told me, you did do some pretty interesting things regardless.”

“Don’t laugh! Thanks to this mask, all my earnings went up in smoke, and the erotic stuff didn’t go anywhere either!”

“Vent your frustrations towards that left behind shopkeeper laying over there. She’s the one who misplaced the complimentary gift masks and replaced them with high quality magic ones.”

Even if you say that, her eyes are rolled into the back of her head and she’s charred to a crisp. I can’t really do much more to her.

“Even for me, when she’s in such a state... Hmm, wait, if Rain unwittingly puts on her mask again, then I would switch positions-”

“Unfortunately, that’s impossible. For crime prevention purposes, that item can only be activated once. Someone who is strong in magic might be able to activate it one or two more times, but it’s impossible for you.”

So it’s a once in a lifetime item?

I really want to get even with Rain for spending all my money, but I most probably won’t ever see them again.

I patted my empty wallet. Before thinking about filling it back up, I first needed to tackle the issue of filling my belly. Without money, I could either hit up the Eris Church’s soup kitchen or steal some food from that old man at the general store.

Just as I was considering which side I would rather deal with, I caught sight of Yunyun heading into a cafe.

Well, she showed up at just the right time. She might complain, but she’d definitely treat me to a meal if I prostrate myself before her.

Entering the cafe behind Yunyun, I spotted her jittery form at a seat by the window.

And the person seated next to her is the Explosion Girl. Crap. She has no reservations

about speaking her mind and is quite protective of Yunyun, so she's really troublesome to deal with.

I made to leave, but then I caught sight of the two other women at the table. One was in an attention-grabbing white suit and the other was a plain-looking girl.

What are Claire and Rain doing here?

"Pull yourself together, Rain. You're acting like you have a hangover. You did act pretty strange after wearing that mask yesterday."

"I'm sorry, Claire-sama. Perhaps it's because of the dream I had. I recall dreaming I was an adventurer and drank a large amount of beer, but..."

I'm a little curious as to what this strange combination are doing together, so I stealthily took a seat at a neighbouring table in order to listen in.

"We called you over here today to discuss the issue of I-Alice-sama."

"Megumin-sama, it has been some time. Is Kazuma-sama doing well? You didn't bring him along, did you?"

"He seems to be busying himself with lazing around the house today, so no."

Rain cautiously asked, and heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing Megumin's answer. Claire, too, relaxed her posture almost imperceptibly.

...Why are they so guarded towards him? Just what did Kazuma do? I should ask him the next time I have the chance.

"Hearing that puts me at ease. We're here today because we have a request for you. I've heard that Alice-sama considers the two of you her closest friends amongst the adventurers of Axel."

"Ehehehe, close friends..."

"Please stop laughing so creepily. Alice isn't a friend, she's a member of my band and I'm her boss. And she's also my rival of sorts. Did she make some selfish remarks that troubles you because of her position? She hasn't been coming over to play recently."

So all of them know Alice?

Judging from the way she's speaking, Megumin knows Alice's true identity. As for Yunyun... Nah, she doesn't know.

"The family is particularly busy right now, and the neighbouring country is sending a delegation to us too, so Alice-sama can't be away for long at the moment. Though, even if that wasn't the case, it's quite troubling how easily she sneaks away."

"We know that Alice-sama has an accomplice helping her from the outside. Whenever she sneaks away, someone always sets off an Explosion nearby to draw men away from the capital... Do you two have an idea about that?"

Yunyun and Megumin stiffened upon hearing Claire's question, didn't they?

"There's someone who'd do such a thing? There really are some shameless people walking around."

"Y-Yes. I-I know nothing about it. I'm not being forced into it by Megumin or anything."

Yunyun is just absolutely horrible at lying. She's definitely involved somehow.

Anyone who saw her nervous figure as she tried to play it cool would naturally become suspicious.

"Claire-sama, let's leave that issue to some other day. We're here to make a request of them today, after all."

She's really good at this. With this, the Explosion Girl and Yunyun won't be able to refuse any request they make.

It's not strictly speaking a threat, but it certainly gives them a lot of leverage.

"So, about our request, a few days ago, we got into a little bit of an argument with her. Ever since then, she has been in a bad mood and refuses to speak with us."

"Though she looks really cute when she puffs up her cheeks."

"Claire-sama, please keep quiet for a while. We managed to raise her mood a little last night, but it seems like she's been accumulating a lot of stress recently."

“As both her educators and her bodyguards, there are some things that are hard for her to say to us. So, as her friends, we were wondering if you know of anything that’d be great to help her de-stress.”

Well, that kid does have to deal with the pressures that come with being the first princess of the country.

A princess who desires to fly free, huh...

“Umm, can I ask why is Alice-chan so stressed?”

“My apologies, I suppose that was too little information. I can’t go into much detail as it concerns family affairs, but in short. In truth, Alice-sama has an excellent older brother, but he’s currently at the front lines in order to fight against the Demon King’s army. As such, as the first pri... lady of the house, most of the responsibilities of running the estate falls to Alice-sama.”

“Well, someone in Alice’s position is sure to run into a lot of troubles. Ah, no, I shouldn’t say that in front of Yunyun.”

“I’ve always had this feeling, but what exactly are you hiding from me!? It’s odd how little common sense Alice-chan has, and isn’t it strange for her to have two nobles as her educators!? Don’t tell me...”

Seemingly the only one out of the loop, Yunyun grabbed Megumin by the shoulders and started shaking her.

“There are some things in this world you’re happier not knowing.”

“Saying that just bothers me even more! Rain-san, Claire-san, you two are hiding something too, right?”

“We are not at liberty to disclose Alice-sama’s secrets. And if you are aware of the secret, your life might be risk... Even after knowing that, do you still wish to find out?”

Yunyun vigorously shook her head.

Rain bowed apologetically, but I think it really is for the best for Yunyun to remain ignorant.

If she ever found out that Alice is the princess, she'd be too nervous to even hold a proper conversation with her.

"May I turn back to the original topic?"

"Ah, sorry. Please continue!"

"So, if you two know of her favourite foods or anything she is interested in, we would appreciate it very much if you could tell us."

"Hmm, well, she likes hearing about adventuring stories. She does enjoy listening to Kazuma's tales, almost like she looks up to the adventurers who live freely."

"We are aware of that. In preparation to allow Alice-sama to live the lifestyle of an adventurer for a day, we've already experienced some adventuring work. Thank you very much for the other day, Yunyun-dono."

"T-There's... Please raise your head! I had a lot of fun too."

"Say, hasn't your circle of friends gotten larger without me noticing?"

The Explosion Girl wrinkled her brow.

That's definitely jealousy. They do quarrel and fight every so often, but it's common knowledge amongst the adventurers of Axel that those two are actually pretty close.

"Apart from that, well... I suppose it'd be the story about that Dragon Knight. That story really is quite romantic."

"The story about that useless Dragon Knight who kidnapped the princess and threw away his rank and status? What's so appealing about that story?"

My thoughts exactly.

"Why do you think this way, Megumin!? That's a wonderful story!"

That story is really popular amongst idealistic girls, but Megumin is a girl who has no interests in anything other than Explosion.

Claire and Rain made a complicated expression.

“That story is pretty famous amongst the nobility too. I’m sure that story resonates deeply with Alice-sama.”

“Claire-sama, speaking of Dragon Knights, didn’t the neighbouring kingdom send one to the capital as a delegation recently? Couldn’t we make a request of him to give her a ride?”

“No, wait, isn’t that way too risky? Plus, considering our positions, there’s no way they’ll allow that.”

They continued talking about various other matters, but I don’t get the feeling that I’d be able to sponge a meal off them, so I made my leave.

“If a princess were to make such a request, it’d cause no end of problems. I can sympathize with her on that front.”

I said to no one in particular. In order to get rid of the clawing feeling in the pit of my stomach, I headed over to a tavern.

Part 2

Great, what’s going on now?

I couldn’t find anyone I knew at the tavern, and predictably, they wouldn’t agree to put it on my tab, so I had no choice but to head up to my room and collapse onto my bed.

To ease my boredom, I placed the mask Sir gave to me on my face, and found myself standing in a completely different place.

A blonde-haired, masked girl is standing before me.

She’s wearing a set of expensive-looking pajamas, and, for some reason, she has a blanket tied around her neck like a cloak.

I feel like I’ve seen her somewhere before, but I can’t quite make out her features through the mask.

“Alice of the Silver-Haired Thieving Band is here!”

She dramatically fluttered her blanket-cloak back and struck a strange pose.

So this is Alice, aka Iris, the first princess of the Kingdom.

I thought our spirits ended up swapped again, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

I had absolutely no control over Iris's body. Furthermore, neither my words nor my thoughts seem to be reaching her. It seems like I'm merely an observer here.

"This mask is really cool. If only I could join Onii-sama with his chivalrous thief activities while wearing this mask."

Her voice sounded incredibly lonely.

The princess wants to become a chivalrous thief. Anyone who hears that would think of it as an impossible dream.

"Right, enough with such fantasies. I still have some work I need to do.

She pulled out one of the drawers of her desk and retrieved a stack of documents.

Looking at the papers on top of the desk, she placed her hand on her forehead and sighed.

"This really won't work out. If we don't agree to Levi-sama of Elroad's request and secure their financial assistance, the battle against the Demon King will..."

The document on top of the desk seems to document the amount of money Belzerg is currently receiving from the other nations.

This country serves as the bottleneck against the forces of the Demon King. If it were to fall, the other countries would be at risk.

The other countries are very well aware of this, of course, and as such provide military aid to this country. However, countries with poor military strength instead support the war effort with funds, and the country that provides the most in financial assistance is Elroad.

That is, if I recall correctly.

That country is famous for its casinos which attract the fabulously wealthy to spend their money there. According to rumours, they have gotten extremely wealthy through that alone.

“If I’m betrothed to him and make an appeal in person, I should be able to guarantee the funds.”

So this must be why Iris is so stressed.

The betrothal itself isn’t particularly odd. Getting married to secure political alliances and seal deals is almost like the duty of royal born women.

Falling in love with someone in a different station and marrying them is something that only happen in stories. Most royal marriages are devoid of such dreams.

“I wonder what Onii-sama is doing right now... He’s always surrounded by women, so I’m a little uneasy. It’d be really unfair if Boss makes a move on him just because I’m not there!... Will he be angry if he finds out about the betrothal? Or maybe he’d be jealous instead... I’d be really happy if he did get jealous...”

She really does seem her age when she clutches her blushing cheeks in her palms and dances around like that.

“If he were to swoop in and steal me away like that Dragon Knight... I wonder what that princess was thinking when she threw away everything to be with the one she loves...”

That only happened because that person ordered him to abscond with her. I really wanted to say that right now.

“Sigh...” No, there’s no way I can be this selfish.”

Selfish, huh? It’s really cute that you’d use that term to describe someone who would merely entertain those thoughts without going through.

A truly selfish princess would be someone who wouldn’t listen to anyone and drag a straight laced knight with her to live as she wishes.

“If I were to run away, this country will definitely be destroyed at the hands of the demons. I can’t possibly do something so irresponsible... But, if I can fly freely in the

skies like that princess on the back of a dragon..."

She's bearing a responsibility far too big for her tiny body.

It's really admirable that she hasn't collapsed under that. That's what I genuinely think.

Walking out onto the balcony, she gazed upon the dragon sleeping in the middle of the courtyard and let out a lonely sounding giggle.

The dragon is fitted with a riding saddle. One I'm very familiar with.

It can't be from Elroad... It must be the dragon that the delegation from the neighbouring country rode here.

"Iris-sama, it's almost time for your bath."

"I understand, I'll be down shortly."

That's Claire's voice.

Iris started moving towards the door before she remembered that she still had the mask on. She stopped and briefly admired herself in front of the mirror before raising her hand towards the mask.

Part 3

When my vision came back to me, I was staring up at the aging ceiling of the inn.

In my hand was a cracked mask. It seems like it was pushed past its limits and broke.

It must have activated because of the vast amounts of mana that Iris, as a royal, possesses. That's the only explanation that made sense.

The hardships of the royalty.

In the past, I've seen exactly what that means first hand...

"No, no, cut it out! Don't make me remember it now!"

I knew I shouldn't have gotten involved with Iris. Betrothal and the hardships of being a princess. Everything about her just reminds me of that other person.

I can't help but see the image of a certain woman whenever I close my eyes.

"I should try and get Lynn to buy me some beer."

I definitely won't be able to sleep tonight without some alcohol. I leapt off the bed, put on my jacket, and left the room.

In the end, I couldn't get a wink of sleep at all.

Despite her complaints, Lynn did buy me a few drinks, but I didn't get drunk at all, and before I knew it, it was morning.

"This really isn't like me. Guess I'll find a friend and get a stiff one to go."

As usual, I made my way to the tavern of the guild. I couldn't see Kazuma anywhere, but I did spot Yunyun and Megumin.

They were seated at her usual table by the window and were loudly talking about something.

I took a seat at a nearby table, but they were too involved in their conversation to notice my arrival.

"I really think a walk would be best to de-stress! She could head to my house or go shopping together. What do you think?"

"*Sigh*~. Well, I personally don't mind, but as I've said before, the security around Alice's house is pretty tough. We won't be able to bring her out easily. A frontal assault is so hopeless that it's not even worth considering."

"Say, can't we just ask her out to play normally? Why are you talking about dangerous things like frontal assault right off the bat? You really are hiding something important from me, right!? Don't leave me out! Tell me!"

Yunyun pleaded with tearful eyes, and Megumin placed a hand on her forehead.

It seems like she's keeping Yunyun ignorant partly to tease her, and partly out of

consideration for her personality.

“Do you really want to know? Are you really fine with me telling you? You won’t regret it, will you?”

“Eh? If you put it that way... It kinda scares me.”

“If you really want to know, I don’t mind. I already warned you, so even if you cry and whine afterwards...”

Suddenly assuming a gentle tone, Megumin grabbed Yunyun by the shoulders, preventing her from running away.

Probably unnerved, Yunyun desperately struggled against her grip, but it seems like she isn’t able to get free.

“W-Wait, Megumin! I think it’d be best if I didn’t know!”

“No, please listen. Actually, listen! It’s too late for regrets now!”

“No, don’t, stop! It’s fine! I don’t want to know!”

Just as I was watching the antics of those two while helping myself to some water, someone took a seat opposite me.

“Seeing you stare at girls really makes you seem like a proper criminal.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean!?”

The one who made me out like I’m some sort of villain was Lynn.

Normally I would retaliate with some moves of my own, but I do owe her for treating me to a drink last night, so I’ll hold off this time.

“Waitress, one salad please!”

“I’ll have a beer and something deep fried.”

“Why are you piggy backing off my order? Just so you know, I won’t be treating you.”

“Don’t be so petty. Why don’t you help yourself to some meat too? Isn’t it because you always eat salad that you’re so flat?”

I stared directly at Lynn’s chest. She really isn’t developed at all.

And yet Yunyun managed to grow a fine pair even at such a young age.

“One of these days, all the victims of your sexual harassment are going to gather together and have you thrown in jail. Just so you know, yesterday wasn’t a treat. It’s a loan.”

“Ah, you little! That’s unfair! You said it was a treat yesterday! Is your personality as petty as your chest!?”

“I don’t want to hear that from you!... Say, haven’t you been acting weird lately?”

Her face suddenly turned serious, and she moved her face closer to mine while staring me directly in the eye.

She was close enough that our foreheads were just a hair’s breadth away from each other, so, to get out of this, I rolled my lips into a kiss.

Lynn smiled... and poked me in the eye.

“Gyaaaa! You almost destroyed my eye! Wouldn’t you normally lean in for a passionate kiss!?”

“Why do I have to do that with you? Anyway, why don’t you give them a hand? It really bothers you, right? You’ve been acting strange ever since you met with those nobles.”

I don’t even need to ask who she’s referring to.

Turning my attentions back to the Crimson Demons, they were currently discussing a plan where Megumin attacks the gates with an Explosion before Yunyun boldly walks through the wreckage and announces her name.

“It feels like they’ll do something really outrageous if you leave them be.”

“Even they wouldn’t actually go through with that... They won’t do that, right?”

I thought I was confident no one would actually do such a thing, but looking at them...

Megumin angrily stood up and left the guild, and Yunyun chased after her while screaming 'I'm begging you, please stop!'

"...I think it's best if we were to watch over them."

"...Y-Yeah."

It'd be one thing if they were pulling such antics in Axel, but they would be arrested instantly if they were to do it in the capital.

Iris will probably be able to get them off the hook, but I really don't think it's a good idea to put more stuff on her plate right now.

I really want to just drop everything on her guardian, Kazuma's, lap, but I don't have the time to go fetch him at the moment.

The two of them headed immediately for the teleport station and left for the capital. Using Lynn's money, we followed after them.

"Hey, this is a loan, alright? You hear me? Don't cover your ears."

"Don't worry, I'll pay you back when I strike a fortune. I'll just need to get on my feet first."

"Yeah, and how long will I have to wait for that to happen? There is nothing less trustworthy than your word."

She really is a naggy woman.

We'll lose sight of the Explosion Girl if we get into an argument here, so I bit back my reply for now.

The two of them headed straight for the castle. I really doubt that she'd be foolish enough to force her way in during broad daylight. With that in mind, I tailed them from a respectable distance away, but...

"Right, I have a perfect shot from this square! My Explosion will blow the gates wide open, so I'll leave the rest to you!"

She really is a fool.

The crazy girl stood in the center of the square, pointed her staff at the castle, and started chanting. Next to her, the loner was just waving her hands around in a panic and being completely useless.

“Please stop! They’ll definitely get angry!”

“As if you’ll stop her with that.”

I snatched the staff out of the Explosion Girl’s hands in the middle of her chant.

“What are you doing!? Give that back!”



I held the staff high above her reach, and she repeatedly hopped in place in her attempts to grab it back.

She looks kinda cute when she does that. Still, I wonder if all Crimson Demons think the same way.

I heard that Yunyun was considered strange by Crimson Demon standards. If there was an entire village full of people who think the same way as this Explosion Girl... Nah, there's no way that can be the case.

"You two should really stop doing stupid things."

"I don't want to hear that from a delinquent!"

"Such words have no persuasive power at all when they come from Dust-san..."

I drove my knuckles into Yunyun's temples.

"Uuu, this is horrible. I'm getting sexually harassed by Dust-san."

Right, leaving her aside...

"What are you doing here? If you're here to get in our way, the future chief of the Crimson Demons, Yunyun, won't stand idly by!"

"Why do you only acknowledge me as the future chief during such situations!?"

"I'm not here to stop you or get in your way or anything."

"Eh, you're not going to stop her!?"

"Now, now, just hear me out. You need to use your heads when you're up to no good. Just charging straight in is the actions of a fool. You need to look deeper and find out what they really hate. That will lead you to the most efficient method."

Saying that, I stepped back with a smile.

These guys are too straightforward, and they're thinking too small scale. If we are doing this, we are going to go all out.

“You really are a villain, aren’t you?”

Lynn might be saying that, but she doesn’t look the slightest bit displeased right now.

Part 4

Everyone stared at me when I brought up who should be the one to sneak into the castle. I tried to protest, but it became clear that there isn’t anyone else suitable for the role, so I reluctantly agreed.

We didn’t have enough materials for the operation, so I alone went back to Axel.

Returning is easy enough, but the real problem is actually finding him.

Lynn told me of a method that will get him to show up, or so she claims, but I wonder if it would really be that easy.

“Well, there’s no harm in giving it a shot. Ah~ I want to have a drink with a fellow man today~! I wonder if there’s a rich noble young master who would give me a treat~!”

I said loudly as I walked down the main street.

Several of the passersby pointed at me and whispered amongst themselves, but I’m not the type of person to be so easily discouraged.

“If he really would come out with just this-”

“If it isn’t Dust-san. *Pant, Pant*. It’s been some time.”

“Guwah!?”

When did he!?

Standing behind me was a noble wearing a helmet.

...He really appeared. I first ran into him when he helped out the succubus store when they were in a spot of trouble. Ever since then, I’ve been mentally calling him ‘Helmeted Bastard’.

Lynn told me that he’d be hanging around the tavern facing the main street around

this time of day, but I didn't expect to find him so quickly.

"Yeah, it's been some time. If you are having trouble breathing, why not take off your helmet?"

"N-No, it's fine. This is a very important helmet, *pant pant*. Pay it no mind, *pant pant*."

"Well, if you say so... Oh, yeah, it must be some kind of fate for us to meet here. There's a favour I would like to ask of you."

"What is it!? I'll do anything you ask of me!"

The hand he used to accept mine is covered in sweat.

He might have been in the middle of a jog, what with the sweat and his heavy breaths and all.

"Well, see..."

As night fell, we decided to put the operation we discussed this afternoon into action.

Well, I say operation, but it's really a very simple strategy.

Encamped near the castle, I gazed up towards the sky.

Unfortunately, it's completely overcast tonight, so not a single star was visible to me.

"It should be about time."

The moment I said that, a streak of red light shot into the sky and exploded with a loud boom.

I'm quite some distance away, but even I can feel the shockwave from that blast.

That explosion chased away the clouds covering the sky, revealing a blanket of shimmering stars.

The capital is a place where even casting low grade magic in the streets would result in a large commotion. It should be obvious what would happen in such a city if Explosion magic was unleashed.

The castle gates flew open, and a large amount of soldiers stepped out at once.

“There is no doubt that whatever unleashed such powerful magic in the city is an ally of the Demon King’s army! There’s no need to bring them in alive, so use your own judgement!”

The one standing in the middle and giving out such dangerous sounding orders is Claire. Her white suit really stands out at night. Additionally, it seems like Rain is with her too.

Well, this would be the way a castle guard would normally react. At this rate, there is a chance that Yunyun, who’s currently running away with the drained Megumin in tow, could be captured.

Thus, there’s a need to sow confusion into their ranks.

“The Silver Haired Thieving Band appeared at that nobles mansion!”

The voice of a young woman emerged from an alleyway.

This is echoed by not just one or two other voices, but the voices of almost everyone in the neighborhood.

Seems like Lynn did a good job spreading the story.

“Hey, did you hear!? They’re holding a sale for those new diet pills that lasts only for today!”

“That highly popular product that even the nobility and royalty make use of!? If we don’t hurry up, it’ll be all sold out!”

This time, the voices of two men emerged from an alley directly opposite the first.

That’s the voices of Taylor and Keith who agreed to help out even though they weren’t told the full details.

My companions really are something... I’ll have to treat them to a mug or two later.

Hearing those voices, Claire and Rain fell into a panic.

“They must have made use of the commotion to slip in! We’re splitting up the troops. I’ll go after the one who casted the magic, Rain go after the Silver Haired Thieving Band.”

“I understand. Be careful... Claire-sama, aren’t you heading in the opposite direction from where the Thieving Band appeared?”

“O-Oh, yeah. It seems I’ve gotten turned around.”

She’s playing it off, but the diet pill sale definitely weighted heavily on her mind. From the looks of things, it seems like she already finished off what she bought.

Splitting them into three groups would be ideal, but having them split into two is fine too.

Still, that’s not all. I still have one more card left to play.

I acted like I was drunk and wandered into their path.

“Oh~, if it isn’t the nee-chan from the other night. How have you been doing-”

“You’re Trash, if I recall. What are you doing here... No, now’s not the time for that. We don’t have the time to spend dealing with a drunkard! Get out of the way!”

“My apologies, it’s an emergency!”

They’re panicked enough that they aren’t even trying to conceal their impatience.

Still, they haven’t lost their sense of judgement. I should sow a little more chaos into their minds.

“Oh, I see. Sorry for getting in your way while you’re in a hurry. By the way, have you seen Kazuma around?”

At that instant, the blood drained from their faces.

“What did you just say? Kazuma-dono is in the capital!?”

“You’re kidding, right!? Claire-sama gave strict instructions that he’s to be prohibited from using the teleport station!”

The two of them immediately wheeled on me.

I've heard that they don't get along well with Kazuma, but I didn't expect that just dropping his name would be this effective.

"Ah, so that's why he was covering his face with a hood when he came here with us. I thought it was a little strange."

"I slipped up. So he slipped in together with other adventurers..."

"W-What should we do? If Kazuma-sama came here to meet up with Alice-sama, there's a chance that all this is just a distraction..."

"In that case, we can't allow the security of the castle to be thinned. However...!"

I kinda feel bad for Kazuma, but dropping his name here really did have the desired effect. Far more than I expected, in fact.

Giving up on one of their leads, or dividing their soldiers into three groups. It's certainly not an easy decision.

At an impasse, the two of them started bickering over what course of action they should pursue.

The soldiers couldn't take action without orders, so they simply waited restlessly while the two of them tried to reach a solution.

All of them had their attentions fixed squarely upon Claire and Rain.

This is my chance. I slipped into the alley and put on the suit of armour and helmet that the Helmeted Bastard lent me.

I always felt that his helmet looked familiar, but as it turns out, he bought the very same helmet that I sold to the general store quite some time ago.

This operation wouldn't work without that helmet, so I had to ask him to lend it to me, just for today. Not only that, but I also had to request a fitting suit of armour to go with it.

He immediately agreed, but before he handed the items over, he said,

“You don’t have to wash or wipe it down before returning it! No, really, it’s fine!”

When I asked him why he’s so readily agreeing to my requests, he said

“I’m the sort of person who can’t speak normally without wearing that helmet, and I have no friends either. That’s why being relied upon like this makes me really happy.”

Well, he seems genuinely happy, at least.

So he’s basically like a male version of Yunyun. I should have a drink with him sometime, but for some reason, that person really rubs me the wrong way.

He had a bag on his head when he handed the helmet to me, in order to avoid having his face exposed.

“Ah, well, I guess it’s fine. I’ll have a drink with him sometime later. On his dime, of course.”

It’s been a while since I’ve been clad in proper armour.

With this, my form is completely hidden.

I’ve made all my preparations, but here’s where the main event lies.

Stepping out of the alley, I boldly walked up towards Claire who was still deciding on their next course of action.

“What’s the matter? It’s quite noisy out here.”

“You must be the delegation. My apologies for the noise!”

I casually waved Claire’s apologies away.

Great, she didn’t notice. The design of the armour is a little different, but the helmet is the real deal. It might’ve been a different story if I was standing in broad daylight, but in the dim light of the moon, it’d be hard to pick up on those differences.

Not to mention, with their current panicked mental state, they weren’t in the right frame of mind to pick up on such inconsistencies.

The helmet also muffled my voice, so they couldn't tell that it was me.

"If there's anything I can do to help, don't hesitate to ask."

"No, we cannot ask such a thing from a guest! The commotion should die down soon, so please relax in your room."

"There's no need to stand on ceremony. With my dragon, I can easily provide an aerial view of the area."

Rain didn't catch on to me either.

Accepting their apologies, I executed a perfect bow and walked through the front gates of the castle.

Yes, step one is clear!

I've heard about the layout of the castle from Megumin, but it's not like she knows every nook and cranny of it, so there's no time for any unnecessary detours.

I headed straight for my destination.

I ran into several maids and soldiers, but all of them gracefully bowed to me as I walked past and none of them got in my way.

Acting as though I belonged here, I made my way down the stairs and emerged in the courtyard.

Inside the courtyard is a dragon, curled up into a ball as it slept.

I looked around, but it doesn't seem like its original rider is here.

The dragon woke up and raised its head at me when I moved closer, so I removed my helmet and looked it right in the eye.

Instantly, the dragon lowered its head and closed its eyes.

"Good boy. Can I get you to give me a little help tonight?"

The dragon flared its nostrils and rubbed against my face. I got onto the saddle and

grabbed its reins.

“Right, let’s go!”

I could see Iris standing on the terrace, staring sadly into the night sky.

It is late enough that most kids would be in bed by now, but she was wearing a dress instead of a set of pajamas.

“*Sigh*~ The meeting got extended, and I hadn’t the chance to take a bath... Ah, I’ve been so swamped with work these past few days that I haven’t even five minutes to myself. I want to go play with everyone in Axel... If only Onii-sama would take me awa-... Eh?”

Iris stiffened in surprise as my dragon and I emerged from beneath the terrace.

While keeping one hand on the reins to make the dragon hover in position, I extended the other hand towards Iris.

“If you’d like, would you care to join me on a nightly stroll?”

Recalling my old manner of speech, I offered in a gentle tone.

“Umm, err, you’re the delegation, yes? I’m happy that you made such an offer to me, but wouldn’t this cause problems for you?”

“There won’t be a problem as long as no one finds out. Fortunately, there’s been a commotion nearby and most of the soldiers have been sent out. If I recall, the two Crimson Demons were talking about storming the evil castle to save their captured comrade or something of the like.”

“Is that... Boss, I wonder...”

A troubled expression flashed upon Iris’s face for an instant, but was instantly replaced with a smile.

“I bring a message from those two. It’s fine to just let loose every once in a while, just like Kazuma. So, would you like to join me on a journey to the stars?”

“Gladly!”

I firmly grasped Iris's hand, pulled her up on the dragon, and placed her on the saddle behind me.

She wrapped her arms around my waist.

With a little tug on the reins, and a strong flap of the wings, we quickly shot towards the stars.

Between the darkness of the night and the commotion within the city, there isn't a single person who'd be looking up at the skies. Certainly no one who'd notice us.



“Uwaah~ This is amazing! The city and the castle look so tiny!”

Hearing Iris exclaim in wonder, I couldn't help but be reminded of the first time I gave a ride to her.

...Would she be angry if she knew about this? Or would she...

I wouldn't get an answer no matter how much I think about it, so doing so is just a waste of energy. What's important now is to see to the happiness of the princess seated behind me.

Besides, what she told me was:

“You're my knight, so you shouldn't use a spear unless you're protecting me or someone you really want to protect. Do your best with that sword instead.”

So there's no problem with this... probably.

I drove the dragon to move a little faster to give the princess a little more thrill.

“Uwaaaah! This is faster than even the lizard drawn carriage!”

Hearing the excited voice behind me, I drove the dragon onwards.

We crossed mountains, valleys, and saw the vast plains sped by below us. After a few laps around the area, I judged that this is more than sufficient for a night stroll and brought her back to the castle, dropping her off at the same terrace I picked her up from

Though, it seems like she is still bursting with excitement as she got off, clutching her hands towards her chest and looking at me with sparkles in her eyes.

“Today was really fun! Thanks to you, all my stress has been blown away! I think I'll be able to sleep well tonight.”

“There is no greater joy for a knight than to become the strength of such a wonderful princess.”

We haven't been away for very long, and it doesn't seem like anyone has noticed her disappearance.

Saying something so pompous makes my back itch, but I suppose I can put up with it for today.

“Now then... Oh, if it’s not too presumptuous of me, allow me to offer a few small words. There’s no shame in relying on others. Just as you think of them as important, so do they too share the same thoughts towards you.”

“Rely on others... I see. It’s true, perhaps I did try to bear too much upon myself. Heh. Thank you very much, Dragon Knight-sama.”

Unlike a certain someone, I have no interest in kids.

But seeing her smile like that makes me sort of understand why Claire became so smitten with her.

If she can make such a genuine smile, it seems like things will be fine.

I gave Iris, who was giving me a wide exaggerated wave, a slight bow, left the terrace, and guided the dragon back to the courtyard.

“Thanks for your help today. You did good.”

I patted the dragon around the neck, and it comfortably closed its eyes.

I did push him in the middle of the night, so I really wanted to pamper him a little more, but it’d be real troublesome if Claire or the others were to return.

I retraced my steps and left the castle.

Giving the saluting soldiers a bow, I snuck off into the nearest alley and removed my helmet and armour.

“Now then, all that remains is to see if those two managed to escape.”

I stuffed the armour and helmet into the large luggage I borrowed from Yunyun and made my way to the rendezvous point.

The only other person who was there was Lynn. She gave me a wave as she saw me approach.

“My side went off perfectly. How did it go for you?”

“No problem at all. Megumin and Yunyun hid in an Axis Cult church, so the soldiers shouldn’t be able to get close to them.”

“Well, even the Demon King’s army avoids them. It definitely is the safest place in town.”

I don’t know why, but the two of them seem quite familiar with the Axis Cult. Perhaps it’s because the Axis Cult and Crimson Demons are both a little shot in the head, so they find some kinship in each other?

“I won’t ask you for details, but was Alice-chan satisfied?”

“Oh, she is very satisfied. You could say she’s been blown away, in a lot of ways.”

This is Lynn we are talking about, so she might have guessed who Alice really is.

And, what happened in my past too...

Lynn, who was walking in front of me, suddenly turned around and looked at me with upturned eyes.

“You’ll tell me someday, right?”

“Yeah, eventually.”

“Right, I’ll let you off for today.”

I didn’t ask what exactly she referred to.

I’m sure there will come a day where I must reveal what happened today and my past to her.

As for when, well, who knows?

Epilogue

<Due to the shortness of this epilogue, I will be bundling the Dust 3 short story together with it as well.>

A very familiar trio is standing in front of the mansion.

Megumin, Alice, and Yunyun, huh. Their ages are pretty close, so they must find it easy to get along.

The fact that she's playing around in Axel probably means that her business as the princess must be concluded.

Seems like Megumin and Alice are quarreling, and Yunyun is trying to stop them.

Poking my nose into the middle of a quarrel between women never results in anything decent.

I'll just pretend I didn't see them and pass by.

"Stop fighting, you two! Megumin, stop chanting your Explosion magic! Alice, too, stop showing off the ring you got from Kazuma-san! Aah! Dust-san! Please help me stop these two!"

Damn, she saw me.

I made shooing motions at Yunyun who approached me with teary eyes.

"Don't drag me into this. They say that friends who fight with each other are closer, don't they? Just leave them alone."

"If these two really go at each other, it'll be a catastrophe! Are you really fine with that!?"

The power of Megumin's explosion is certainly something to behold.

The royalty of this country are rumoured to be pretty strong thanks to the blood of

heroes flowing in their veins.

If the two of them were to seriously go at each other...

“Hey, you two. If you want to go wild... go do it in front of our usual tavern.”

“What are you saying!?”

“What? If the tavern were to be caught up in it and destroyed, my tab would be wiped clean too.”

“Do you even listen to yourself!? Don’t you have a single shred of humanity within you!?”

I thought it was a pretty good idea myself, but it seems like Yunyun disagrees.

Perhaps hearing Yunyun and me quarrel soothed their anger, but Megumin and Alice turned away from each other.

Apparently, Megumin had an errand to run or something, for she wandered off somewhere else, but Alice walked over to me.

She was staring directly at my waist for some reason.

“What, are you interested in a man’s ass now?”

“Of course not! That sword just caught my interest. I’m sorry for setting Claire on you in the past.”

Even though she’s royalty, she’s honestly apologizing. That’s quite impressive. Normally, nobles and royals would never admit their mistakes, instead stomping off back home to make some unreasonable demands.

“If you feel sorry, then treat me to a meal or something the next time you’re with Kazuma.”

“Hehe, very well.”

I thought that was the end of our conversation, so I moved to leave, but Alice jogged up to me and pulled on the sleeve of my shirt.

“What, was there something else?”

“Keep this between us, but a Dragon Knight-sama once took me on a night stroll together with him. Afterwards, I thanked the Dragon Knight-sama, but he claimed that he knew nothing about that. And now that I think about it, I feel that his physique was slightly different as well.”

She actually went and thanked him in person?

...I miscalculated. Given her personality, it would've been natural to expect her to do that.


“Dragon Knight? What are you talking about?”

“No, it's fine. I'm just talking to myself. If you ever run into that Dragon Knight somewhere, please relay this message to him. ‘Thank you for giving me such a wonderful night, Dragon Knight-sama.’”

I waved my hand without turning around and left the place without saying anything.

There's no need to confirm or deny that. As long as it was a happy memory for Iris, that would do just fine.

Afterword



Iris-sama is too cute...
I'm kinda concerned
for Claire's future,
in a lot of ways.

Hagure Yuuki



Congratulations on the release of the third volume of
"That Fool Too!". It seems like the comic version has also
started, so congratulations for that too! Those of you who
came here from the main series, thank you very much!

Akatsuki Natsume

Congratulations on the release of the third volume-!!
Hagure-sensei's illustrations are a feast for
the eyes as always... Personally, I think it's a really
precious thing to see Claire and Lynn in colour...

Mishima Kurone

Short story

A serious day

“I think I’ll go on an adventure.”

I declared as we were having a meal at the guild.

My companions froze for a moment, but resumed eating their meals after giving me the barest hint of a glance.

I’m not one to be so easily discouraged. I stared at the ceiling, grabbed the hilt of my sword, and launched into a fervent speech.

“I don’t have any money. Normally I would laze around and think of ways to easily earn money. But I recently had a revelation. If I want money, all I have to do is to work hard for it.”

I personally thought that was pretty good.

I’m a little concerned over the silent reactions of my companions, so I lowered my gaze... To find all three of them silently eating their meals.

“...Hey, aren’t you going to say something? ‘Well said,’ or ‘I’m actually moved,’ or any words to that effect? It’s fine to praise me, you know?”

Towards my question, Lynn said in an exasperated manner,

“Aren’t you just stating the obvious?”

“I’m just guessing here, but you’re not going to say you saw a woman caring for a cat caught out in the rain and fell for her, and decided to raise your standing so you can woo her or something as cliché as that, are you?”

“Well, just work seriously from now on.”

These guys... They saw through my perfect strategy!

I tried to put into action one of the tips for raising affection that I came across in one of the books I read at the general store, but it didn't have any effect at all.

Dammit, it's because you stock such useless books that your store isn't crowded. That old man really should treat his work more seriously.

"Right, then, let's go on an adventure."

"Why are you deciding things by yourself? Before we talk about adventure, do we even have a quest?"

"Oh, I found a quest that really caught my eye earlier and brought it with me."

Saying that, I energetically slammed the request against the table.

After confirming the contents of that quest, my companions turned to look at me with doubtful eyes.

"What's with this quest?"

"It's just as it looks. Capture a giant frog alive. It shouldn't be a terribly difficult task with our party."

"Well, it's certainly possible, but, say, Dust, what exactly is anyone going to do with a live giant frog?"

Keith exasperatedly and repeatedly slapped the request.

Taylor didn't say anything, but he nodded along. It seems like he shares their opinion.

"Well, that piqued my interest too, so I tried to get in touch with the person who put that quest up. As it turns out, the original requestor was a certain noble lady."

"A noble lady? What exactly is someone like that going to want a live giant frog for?"

"Maybe she's interested in the food that commoners eat and wants to try some? But there's no reason to request a live capture in that case."

"Hmm... Perhaps she is particular about the freshness of ingredients?"

My companions discussed amongst themselves.

I was similarly confused when I first got the information, but everything clicked together the moment the guild gave me the name of the requestor.

“Yeah, you’d think so, right? But, what if I were to say that the certain noble lady was Lalatina?”

“Ah...”

“Why would Darkness...” x2

Lynn instantly caught onto it, whereas Taylor and Keith still seemed a little confused.

Come to think of it, Lynn experienced Darkness’s... peculiarities first hand, but Taylor and Keith have yet to see her in action.

“Well, there are a lot of uses for one.”

I wouldn’t mind enlightening them, but Taylor does look up to Darkness as a fellow crusader. There’s no particular pressing reason to shatter his illusion of her.

There are quite a few adventurers who remain ignorant of her true nature. They’ll probably fall into despair if they learn of it.

“Darkness probably won’t stiff us on the pay, but before we actually go out and grab one... wouldn’t it be better if we talk with Kazuma first?”

“There’s no problem as long as we get the money, right? Why do we need to confirm everything with my friend?”

“Hearing that she wants a live monster brought before her gives me nothing but bad feelings.”

Actually, yeah. I didn’t think too much about it because she’s a pervert, but... What exactly is she going to do after getting her hands on a live giant frog?

The last time I saw her fight, she threw away her armour and charged into that horde of goblins...

“...Yeah, maybe it’s better to run this through with Kazuma.”

“Right? It’s not like we would lose anything if it turns out to be nothing. Kazuma is the leader of that party, after all.”

“Alright. We’ll head over to Kazuma’s house after lunch.”

When we eventually met up with Kazuma, it seems like it’s the first time he’s heard about this request, so he called Darkness out to give her a lecture.

“It’s not because I’m jealous because you guys are the only ones who get eaten! I just want to get all slimy with that saliva...”

She tried to keep a straight face while spinning all kinds of incomprehensible excuses for Kazuma, but receiving Kazuma’s scoldings just seems to make her more excited.

This girl is absolutely beyond help.

The quest was retracted, but we did receive a cancellation fee. I guess it’s not too bad to live seriously every once in a while.

<And that’s it for Dust 3. I hope you enjoyed reading it. Unfortunately, similar to Dust 2, I wasn’t able to get my hands on the other short stories, so this is the only short story from this volume that will be placed up.

As usual, I’ll be taking a few weeks break to finish up the rest of volume 15. The tentative release date would be 28th December, though I’m considering pushing the day I release chapters to Saturday for logistical reasons. We’ll see how things go when I get around to it.

I’ll also be putting up the Dust 4 Drama CD sometime between the break to make up for the lack of short stories, so look forward to that as well. And of course, you’ll be able to access my works a week in advance through my patron.

Anyways, thank you for your patience, and I’ll see you guys again next month!>



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